



NEW FIRE



TEMIKAMATL

BOOK OF DREAMS

BY JASON CAMINSKY



NEW FIRE TEMIKAMATL

BOOK OF DREAMS

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PROLOGUE

CREATION OF THE WORLD STORY

A story told by Teoxiwl (Precious Turquoise), a Singing Priestess from Ilwikakalko.

BIRTH OF TIME

There was a time when there was no sun. There were no trees or shrubs, no rabbits or monkeys, no deer or wolves, and no snakes. There were no rivers or mountains, no valleys or swamps, and no stars. The wind did not blow and the rain did not fall. There was no land. There was no world. There was only the great void above that was the sky and the roiling chaos below that was the sea.

And then there was Teomochi.

Teomochi created itself from the void and from the chaos. There was nothing, and that was Teomochi. Then there was something, and that was also Teomochi.

Teomochi was all that was and all that ever would be: Male and Female, Light and Dark, Life and Death.

There, up in the highest sky, Teomochi created Time.

BROKEN VESSEL

The Male and Female of great Teomochi came together, and from their union they bore the gods, the children of infinity, the descendants of eternity. Together, these god-children contained Everything of Teomochi. Separate, they were like pieces of a broken vase. Separate, they were like branches of a tree knocked down in a storm. Separate, they were incomplete.

In search of completeness, they began to create words and ask questions of their Parent. They made many words and asked many questions. We still use their words today. We still ask their questions. But Teomochi, who is both silence and noise, was now Silent, and there was no reply.





They spoke to each other, seeking to fill the gaps between themselves. As they spoke they grew hungry. Hunger, you see, is a sign of incompleteness; it is the drive to seek what you lack. But the skies had neither nourishment nor the means to grow any. Searching for sustenance, the gods came down from the sky to find out what lay below. They descended like falling stars.

THE GREAT SEA, THE GREAT MAW

In those days, the space beneath the sky was nothing like our world. There was only a great sea, an ocean of churning chaos inhabited by strange beasts; the other attempts of Teomochi before it invented Time.

The mother of the beasts was Sipaktli, the great Caiman, an alligator with a terrible toothy mouth on every joint. She had every kind of mouth and every kind of hunger. She swam through the ocean devouring everything she saw and turning it into her fearsome children.

The gods came down to the sea looking for a place to grow food and found it overrun with Sipaktli's children. Desperate for land, they began to kill the beasts. Sipaktli was furious. She attacked the gods, her thousands of mouths snapping and biting in all directions. She drove them back into the sky.

The gods conversed in their new language. They needed food and fertile land to grow it, but they knew that Sipaktli would never let them stay long enough to find land or cultivate crops. And even if they found land and managed to grow food, her awful children would eat it all and leave them hungry. The gods decided that they must kill Sipaktli.

THE FIRST BATTLE

Though they agreed that they would kill Sipaktli, they could not agree how. They each wanted to perform the glorious deed, and argued bitterly amongst themselves. At last, the three of the most impatient gods--Ehekamitotiani the Wind god, Oleletlel the Fire god, and Nakoyomiketl the Young god--grew tired of talking and decided to attack. One after another, they flew down from the sky while the other gods watched and cursed their folly.

Ehekamitotiani got to Sipaktli first. He was the fastest and nimblest of the gods. But no matter which way he attacked, one of Sipaktli's deadly mouths snapped at him and drove him back. He ducked and dodged, and he darted and weaved. With all his speed and skill, he could not reach Sipaktli's heart and kill her. Finally, he retreated and climbed back up to the sky.

Oleletlel attacked next. He was the bravest and most fearless of the gods. But no matter how many jaws he smashed, there were always a thousand more snapping and driving him back. He swung and struck, and he tore and slashed. With all his strength and courage, he could not reach Sipaktli's heart and kill her. Finally, he retreated and climbed back up to the sky.

Nakoyomiketl attacked last. He was the youngest and most optimistic of the gods. But as soon as he came close to Sipaktli, she caught him in her teeth. She ripped his skin apart and devoured it. Her body twisted as her greedy mouths battled each other over his remains. Soon there was nothing left of Nakoyomiketl. His bones fell into the sea and slipped out of sight.

The remaining gods wept and mourned the loss of their brother. They realized that they were still young and did not yet have the skill to single-handedly defeat such a foe. Even gods have things to learn, after all.

ITZTECHIWANI'S PLAN

Itztechiwani, the Earth god, was the cleverest and craftiest of them all. She devised a plan to defeat Sipaktli.

"Ehekamitotiani is the quickest. He dodged Sipaktli's bites the most skillfully. Oleletlel is the bravest. He faced her snapping jaws without even flinching. The two of them, working together with my guidance, can certainly accomplish the kill."

Itztechiwani whispered:

"Oleletlel will lure Sipaktli and trick her into biting at him and him alone. While her mouths are all turned inward and fighting each other, Ehekamitotiani will blow in from a distance at great speed and fly close enough to kill her."

The others saw the truth of her words and agreed to the plan, but Ehekamitotiani had a question. What would he use to kill Sipaktli?

Itztechiwani reached into her body and pulled out shards of obsidian and wood--her own bones. She bound them into a giant spear and presented it to Ehekamitotiani.

THE ELEMENTS COMBINE

Ehekamitotiani and Oleletlel gathered their courage and descended from the sky. They spotted Sipaktli's dark shape just beneath the surface of the ocean. Full of determination, Oleletlel flew toward her. Ehekamitotiani flew far away, so far that he could barely see his brother and Sipaktli in the distance. He firmly grasped the spear that Itztechiwani had made for him and waited.

Oleletlel approached Sipaktli and shouted, his voice filled with scorn and disdain. She turned and charged at him, her countless mouths snapping. He stood calm and fearless, then slowly lowered one of his feet down toward her vortex of teeth. One of her mouths caught his foot and ripped it off. All of her other mouths immediately turned inward and fought each other as they tried to devour the foot. Oleletlel backed away without a word.

At that moment, Ehekamitotiani blew in like a hurricane, flying at tremendous speed. Before Sipaktli could look up, he had blown past her and buried his spear in her back, piercing her





heart. Ehekamitotiani snatched Oleletlel and flew back up into the sky as Sipaktli's huge body twisted and writhed cataclysmically. She heaved and shuddered, her mouths screeching in pain. Then, with one final twitch, Sipaktli lay still.

VICTORY, BLOOD, AND DEATH

Ehekamitotiani and Oleletlel triumphantly returned to the sky. The other gods praised them and thanked them for their service. Then Elopataliztli, the Rain goddess, stepped down and began working on Sipaktli's body. She sheared off the thousands of mouths and dumped them into the sea, and then stretched out Sipaktli's body to cover up the great ocean.

Even in death, Sipaktli's teeth were sharp and vicious. They cut at Elopataliztli as she worked. When she finished her task, her skin was torn to bloody strips, but what she had done was a wonder to behold. She had transformed Sipaktli's body into livable, fertile land. The ridges of Sipaktli's back had become mountains and hills and valleys. Sipaktli's skin became soil. The gods rejoiced Elopataliztli's creation.

They also mourned the death of young Nakoyomiketl. This was before they knew that gods are immortal and impossible to destroy. Although they can be hurt and scarred and killed, they are always reborn. Four days later, Nakoyomiketl awoke to discover that he had been sealed beneath the new land formed from Sipaktli's body. His skin was gone, and he had no way out. He writhed and twisted and scratched, but he could not free himself. So he remained trapped, growing angry and full of despair. He became an old and bitter god, ruling over the dark Underworld. He created many terrible things in his bitterness.

CREATING THE WORLD TODAY

It took five gods to defeat Sipaktli and create the world. Five gods fought and strove and struggled, waging the war of creation. That is why today's young warriors work in groups of five to take their first captive. They fight the same war.

One of the gods died. That is the way of war. But we must always remember that his death showed the other gods how to defeat Sipaktli. The sacrifices of the fallen allow others to succeed and survive.

In this way, worlds are made. In this way, we find nourishment. In this way, we draw closer to completeness.

WELCOME TO NEW FIRE!

Greetings and welcome to New Fire, a roleplaying and storytelling game set in the world of Semanawak, a fantasy world inspired by Pre-contact Mesoamerica and the great cultures that lived there--the Aztec-Mexica, the Maya, the Mixtecs, the Olmecs, and many others who inhabited and whose descendants continue to inhabit modern day Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

We are happy you could join us here, and look forward to the marvelous stories you are sure to discover!

WHAT IS NEW FIRE?

New Fire is a collaborative storytelling game. It is a rich, vibrant setting where players come together to create great stories--stories that are better than the ones they could create on their own. Every player contributes, describing situations they encounter and incorporating each others' ideas into one shared story. There is no special skill to narrating your part of the story. Simply speak as if you are reading a book or describing a scene in a movie!

The rules of the game provide guidelines for how and when different players contribute, but the options for storytelling are limitless. Your stories can be about anything that you imagine occurring in the setting. Here are just a few possibilities:

- Gods or spirits menacing a town.
- Wars and political intrigue.
- The interpretation of omens and prophecy.
- Commoners struggling to overcome tyrannical masters.
- Nobles working to keep a fickle mob from destroying itself.

Epic chronicle, modest folktale, and everything in between--the story is yours to tell!

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

Aside from a copy of this book, there are some other things you will need to play New Fire.

PEOPLE

You cannot play New Fire by yourself. We recommend playing New Fire in a group of four to five people. A group of more than five can slow down the action and make it harder for everyone to contribute. A group of just two or three limits the pool of story ideas and requires more of each individual player. These are just recommendations; you are welcome to try the game with as many or as few players as you like.

PLAYERS

Most people playing New Fire are Players. Each Player creates a unique Player Character (PC) and plays the game from the perspective of that character. Players have a great deal of creative control over who their character is and what happens to him or her.

Each Player is responsible for his or her character's role in the shared story. Sometimes a Player will pretend to be his or her character, speaking in the character's voice and acting out his or her actions. Other times he or she will narrate the situation around the character.

There is no winning or losing in New Fire. There is only the story. The goal is to create the most interesting, engaging story that you can. We encourage Players to put their characters into difficult, dangerous situations. Working through challenges requires imagination and quick thinking, both of which make for





a dramatic and exciting story. Death is a major theme in New Fire, and one of the most important choices a Player can make is the way in which his or her character dies.

GIVER OF LIFE

One of the people in the group will have to be a special player known as the Giver of Life, or the Giver.

The Giver is similar to the Gamemaster of other RPGs. He or she runs the world and frames the scenes, presenting them to the Players, giving them opportunities to play their characters against conflict and opposition, and acting as something of a referee. The Giver also plays the parts of the non-player characters (NPCs) and enemies who come up in the story.

The Giver is the World Itself in New Fire, the course things will take without the intervention of the Players. The Players are the Mortals, the ones who find meaning in the things the Giver presents. The Giver sets things in motion, but the Giver alone cannot create the story, cannot keep the world alive. Only the Players can complete the story and animate the world by fighting to preserve it.

Without the Giver, there is no world. Without the Players, there is no story.

DICE

Like many tabletop roleplaying games, New Fire uses dice--specifically, 10-sided dice, which are available at most gaming stores. You will need a set of 10 to play the game properly. Some people like to use their own dice, but there's nothing wrong with sharing one set between everybody.

PAPER AND PENCIL

Players need paper and pencil to keep track of their characters. There is a convenient character sheet template included to streamline the process.

AN OPEN MIND

The world of Semanawak is very different from our own, and the stories that emerge will be different than the ones you're used to. We hope so! That is why we made New Fire--to help you tell stories you haven't heard before.

New Fire is a place of darkness as well as light. Human sacrifice, slavery, and mystical drug use are important features of the world. You will probably encounter them. You will probably *participate* in them. These things have deep meaning in the game, and experiencing them through game play offers you the chance to broaden your understanding of the world and discover things you never thought about before.

Semanawak is a very flawed place, just like the real world. Struggling against these flaws creates drama and excitement. But there are also many things to admire about Semanawak, and we hope you take the time to find and appreciate them.

FANTASY VS REALITY

New Fire is inspired by real world Mesoamerica, but it is not a realistic depiction of the region or any of the cultures found there. *New Fire is not, nor is it intended to be, historically accurate.* Semanawak and the stories that take place there are fictional.

In researching and creating New Fire we have done our best to do justice to the setting that inspires us. We learned as much as we could, and tried to let the things we learned guide our imaginations. Over the course of development we have come to greatly admire the cultures of Mesoamerica. *But there is nothing definitive or authoritative about what we have done, nor do we wish to speak on behalf of anyone but ourselves.* There are answers we were unable to find, and questions we did not think to ask.

Furthermore, in order to make the game more accessible to a general audience, we have used terms that many people are familiar with, such as 'god,' 'priest,' 'tribe' and several others. While convenient, these terms have a variety of implicit meanings and are at best vague approximations of Mesoamerican ideas.

We have done our best to be nuanced and to avoid making unfair assumptions with our language, but we fully acknowledge that we may have fallen short, both in our descriptions and in our understanding. For this we apologize, and again stress that this game should not be used as a source of historical or cultural information.

If you are interested in learning more, there are many fine books available, and many scholars and professors who can offer amazing insight. *But the true experts on Mesoamerica are the Mesoamericans themselves, the descendants of the Aztec-Mexica, Mayas, and countless other indigenous people.* There are millions of people of indigenous Mesoamerican heritage living proudly in the world today, and their culture belongs to them alone. They are the true authorities on these matters. Consider yourself blessed if they choose to share information about their culture with you, for none can speak more movingly, eloquently, or definitively about it than they.

LANGUAGE IN NEW FIRE

Many of the words and names in New Fire come from or were inspired by Classical Nahuatl, the major language spoken in the Aztec Triple Alliance by the Nahua People. We call the language of the game world 'Tonaltekan.' There are definitely differences between Tonaltekan and Nahuatl (both intentional and unintentional), but we want to acknowledge the real world inspiration behind the names and words in New Fire, and provide some quick information to help you learn more about it. Nahuatl is very much a living language today. It is spoken by millions of people throughout Mesoamerica. Calling it a single language is misleading, however, since there are actually countless unique dialects of Nahuatl, many of which would



probably be better described as unique languages themselves.

The Nahuatl languages (collectively part of the Aztec subgroup of the Uto-Aztecan language family) are called agglutinating languages, meaning that they tend to use longer, more complex words that contain many prefixes and suffixes. The theme of Nahuatl is ‘many ideas per word,’ as opposed to languages like English or Spanish, which are ‘many words per idea.’

The names of many places in Mexico come from Nahuatl: Oaxaca, Acapulco, Tlaxcala, Chihuahua, the name Mexico itself, and countless others. Many everyday words also come from Nahuatl--tomato (tomatl in Nahuatl), chocolate (xocolatl), chili, avocado (ahuacatl), coyote (coyotl), and more.

In spite of the large number of speakers and the influence the language has had on the world, most dialects of Nahuatl are considered endangered by linguists because they are not being passed on to children. Many children grow up speaking only Spanish, and their parents do not pass on Nahuatl. Efforts to preserve and revitalize these beautiful languages are underway, but it crucial that such efforts receive support and awareness.

WRITING AND SPELLING

Nahuatl does not have a native alphabet. It did have a writing system, but this functioned differently than what is commonly known as an ‘alphabet’ (one sound per letter), and is no longer in widespread use today. Instead, the words and sounds of Nahuatl are approximated by using a European alphabet, most commonly with Spanish spelling conventions. This results in the characteristically long-looking words and high frequency of ‘x’s’ that many associate with Nahuatl and Aztec names.

We have decided not to use the typical Spanish spelling conventions in New Fire. Instead, we use a more phonetic system. We do this for two reasons: first, this is how our linguistic consultant spells them. She is a native speaker of Nahuatl and a linguist who is active in her Nahuatl-speaking community, so we decided to follow her lead. Second, these alternate spellings also happen to make the words easier to read and pronounce for English speakers.

Though these alternate spellings are used among Nahua speakers, different communities have different opinions on the details. Some prefer a different set of conventions, and some prefer to stick with the Spanish-style conventions. But it is critical that we all realize and acknowledge that it is ultimately *their* decision, not ours.

We replace hard ‘c’ with ‘k’ to indicate the hard velar stop sound, so the name ‘Tlaloc’ becomes ‘Tlalok.’ The combination *ëci/ce’* becomes *ësi/se’*, so *ëcihuatl’* becomes *ësiwatl’*. We also replace ‘hua/hue’ with *ëwa/we’* and ‘cua/cue’ with ‘kwa/kwe. This changes the word ‘Nahuatl’ to ‘Nawatl,’ and ‘Chihuahua’ to ‘Chiwawa.’ Finally, we replace *ëqu’* in ‘que/qui,’ so the

name ‘Quetzalcoatl’ becomes ‘Ketzalkoatl.’

One convention we will be keeping, however, is the letter ‘x.’ X in Nawatl is actually pronounced as a ‘sh’ sound--‘Xochimilco’ is pronounced ‘Shochimilko,’ and ‘Mexico’ would be pronounced ‘Meshiko.’ We do this for many reasons, but foremost among them is because our Nawatl consultant advised us to do so, and she is the speaker and community member, not us. So whenever you see an ‘x’ in a Nawatl word in this book, know that it is pronounced as an ‘sh’ sound.



SEMANAWAK

THE LAND BETWEEN THE WATERS

"The world of Semanawak is a precarious place, young one. It stands upon the back of Sipaktli, the alligator goddess of chaos and destruction whose sleeping corpse forms the land we live on. Though she was killed long ago she still stirs beneath your feet.

It lies stretched beneath the Sun, beneath the goddess Weysitlalin and her son Teoxotlani, who parade across the sky shedding their holy light, then plunge each night into the horrors of the Underworld. If the people are good and duitiful, they will be strong enough to fight their way through to the dawn. But if the people forget their obligations, the Sun will not rise, and the world will remain in eternal night.

The world balances upon an edge thinner than the sharpest blade of obsidian. To either side is eternal darkness. Perhaps someday it will finally fall. But know this, Eagles and Jaguars, brave ones who battled through birth to stand in this fleeting but beautiful land: the edge that the world balances on is You."

--Nekawal (Survivor), Tlamatini of Xochitlan

THE VALLEY

"This is where you were born. This is where all of your people were born. The Valley is the center of the cosmos, the place where East, South, West, and North converge. It is the place where the Skies meet the Earth, and where the Earth meets the Darkness Below. The Valley is the navel of the world.

Think of the Valley as a bowl. Inside this bowl there is food--corn, beans, squash, tomatoes, avocados, rice, turkey, fish, and countless other delicious things for you to eat. There are high mountains on all sides, keeping food in and invaders out. Even when there is famine and starvation all around, you will find food to satisfy your hunger in the bowl that is the Valley.

Think of the Valley as a pitcher. Rain falls into the pitcher and collects there. Some of it falls in directly. Some of it hits the sides and drips down into the middle. But all water poured into the pitcher stays in the pitcher and forms the great Lake Ket-zalatezkatl. Even when there is desert and drought all around, you will find water to slake your thirst in the pitcher that is the Valley.

To the north and south are passes. Think of them as spouts in the side of the pitcher. Spouts for pouring.

This is the Valley. It is the bowl that feeds you, the pitcher that waters you, the vessel that protects you. The food here was served to you by the gods. The water here was poured for you by the gods. You and all that sustains you was prepared for you here. And when you leave the Valley, you are like maize gruel poured from the pitcher of the gods. You may feed the hungry and help children grow, but if you are not careful where you fall, you may end up as food for the ants."

--Kwikatochtli (Singing Rabbit), Tlamatini of Tlatlahako

LANDSCAPE OF THE VALLEY

The Valley is a great basin among the mountains on the sprawling highland plateau of central Semanawak. The valley floor is open plains dotted by sparse trees and shrubs and the occasional volcanic cone or geyser. This plain steadily rises into a region of rolling foothills, and then lifts up into a ring of rugged, snowcapped mountains and volcanos. There are very few flat places; you are almost always walking uphill or downhill.

While no part of the Valley could be called low (even the lowest point is more than 7000 feet above sea level), the center is lower than the surrounding areas, which creates a basin where many rivers and streams flow. These are fed by a combination of mountain runoff, springs, and rain. Since no water can leave



the Valley, it collects here to form the huge, majestic Lake Ketzalatezkatl, and its surrounding marshland.

Though much of the highland plateau that surrounds it is sparse and arid, the Valley itself is lush and fertile. It is home to a wide variety of plants and animals. Water birds, fish, and frogs live in the abundant reeds that flourish along the marshy shores of Lake Ketzalatezkatl and its floodplains.

A thin layer of hardy grass carpets the Valley floor, covering its dark, volcanic soil. The landscape is dotted with cactus, agave, and sage plants. Trees are scarce, although they gather around rivers and other sources of water. Deer, rabbits, coyotes, and lizards inhabit this region by day. When night falls, bats and owls prowl the skies while mice and other small mammals scurry through the underbrush.

Foothills and mountains give way to thick pine and oak forests inhabited by bears, eagles, woodpeckers, peccaries, and pizotes. Jaguars wander these forests like ghosts. The mountaintops are treeless and snowy. The air is thin and cool, and the sun is relentless.

CLIMATE

The Valley lies in the tropics where there are only two seasons: Dry and Wet. During the Dry Season there is little rainfall or cloud cover. The endless sun parches the land until it cracks. During the Wet Season, rain falls each morning, helping the land become rich and green and occasionally causing floods. But the arrival of the Wet Season is extremely variable. It arrives early one year and late the next, and only the wisest sages can predict it with any reliability.

Though the tropical sun is extremely strong, the high altitude and moderating influence of Lake Ketzalatezkatl result in mild temperatures year round. They days rarely climb above pleasantly warm or drop below pleasantly cool. At night, the temperature falls, sometimes enough for frost during the colder months of the year.

MOUNTAINS AND PASSES

Mountains are important features of the sacred landscape of the Valley. They are channels between Heaven and Earth and the Underworld. They are the sources of rain and rivers. they are ancient ancestors and giants who have become one with the world.

Three mountains ranges enclose the Valley. The Kochewa (Waking) Mountains are to the east. The Sun rises over them each day, and the wind and clouds pass between their peaks. The Choka (Weeping) Mountains are to the south and west. They are shrouded in mist, smoke, and foliage from the lush forests that cover them. The Sia (Weary) Mountains are to the north. They are dry towering guardians that shield the Valley from the desert and prowling raiders.

Together the three mountain ranges form a protective ring around the Valley. There are two passes--one to the northwest and one to the southeast. These passes are essential for commerce and trade, allowing the wealth of the world to flow into the Valley and the armies of the Valley to flow out into the world. But they also open the way for invaders. Both passes are guarded by fortresses and linked to the cities by a system of relay messengers to ensure that no invasion catches the people of the Valley by surprise.

VOLCANOES AND GEYSERS

In some lands, Earth is a stable element; it is solid, static, and enduring. In the Valley, the Earth is ever-changing and dynamic. The ground rumbles and pulses with its eon-long heartbeat. It breathes hot gases from its fiery depths. It bleeds blood of molten rock. In the Valley, the Earth is Alive.

The Valley and its surrounding lands are highly volcanic and prone to frequent earthquakes. The soil, the stones, and the mountains were born of the Earth and the fires within it. Many volcanoes are still active, causing tremors and occasional lava flows. The most famous of the volcanos is perpetually-smoking Teminitepetl, but there are many smaller ones hidden among the mountains and scattered across the Valley floor.

Geysers and hot springs are also plentiful. They are places of healing and renewal, home to spirits and portals of divine power.





CAVES

Caves are mysterious, otherworldly places. You may find anything in a cave in Semanawak: spirits both benevolent and malign; visions of past, future, and all that lies between; sacred waters with potent magical properties; strange plants found nowhere else; covens of devoted worshippers; and sometimes even passages to faraway lands.

Each cave is different, but they share one truth: to set foot inside any cave is to leave Earth and enter a realm beyond the Mortal World. Only fools do such a thing lightly.

RIVERS

Rivers are the highways of the world and the conduits of commerce in the Valley. They connect settlements and join many people as one. There are no beasts of burden in the Valley, so there are but two ways to travel: by foot or by boat. Those that need to transport large loads like lumber or block stone prefer the latter.

LAKE KETZALATEZKATL

The sparkling, majestic Lake Ketzalatezkatl lies in the very center of the Valley at the bottom of the basin. It is the ultimate destination of all water in the Valley, and thus it is enormous. The Lake spans much of the Valley floor, but its size fluctuates throughout the year. It spreads and sometimes floods during the Wet Season, then contracts dangerously during the final months of the Dry Season.

On average it takes 2 solid days of rowing to cross the Lake at its widest point. Despite being very broad, it is quite shallow--about four feet deep overall, with a maximum depth of ten feet.

Commerce and trade revolve around Lake Ketzalatezkatl. Merchants bring all of their goods down the rivers and into the Lake. Most commerce takes place in settlements on the Lake, especially the great capitol city of Xochitlan, which is located on a small island in the very center. Boats and canoes of all varieties busily paddle from place to place, bearing goods and curios from all over the world.



HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY

History and mythology blend together in Semanawak, shaping the world just as much as any geographical features of the landscape. The mountains tower, the rivers flow, and the Lake sustains, but it is people who give these things meaning. It is meaning that creates the sacred landscape called Semanawak, just as surely as wind, erosion, and earthquakes.

The past inspires the people of the present, and stories handed down from previous generations are their guide. These stories are gifts from the gods, divine insight granted to the tellers in dreams and omens. The gods change, the world changes, our stories change, and so our truth changes. Each generation must look at the past with its own eyes and create its own stories. A great story may very well change the truths of an entire generation.

Remember: two families may live in the same house, one after the other, but each of those families lives in a different Home.

Here is the story of your generation, as told by Teoxiwił (Precious Turquoise), Singing Priestess of Ilwikalko.

THE FIVE SUNS

Long ago, the gods created the world by defeating the monster Sipaktli and using her corpse to make the land. But they were not satisfied with their creation. It needed people to work the land, grow food, worship the gods, and to give meaning to what they had made.

They created animals first, and each god built what he or she thought best. But the animals could not speak to each other, for they all spoke their own language and could learn no other. They brayed and barked and roared, creating nothing but noise. The gods decided that, in order for the world to work correctly, it needed a plan and a ruler. It needed a Sun.

So the gods created Tletoxiwakan, City of the Sacred Flame, a temple to house the holy fire that could give them the power to shine, and they took turns ruling on high as the Sun.

The first Sun was Oleletlel the Red Sun. He created people made of fire and ash. The Fire People were strong and brave warriors, but they did nothing but fight. They burned up the world, and eventually the goddess of Earth buried them.

Next was Itztechiwani the Green Sun. She created people made of stone. The Stone People were clever and inventive, but they only knew how to create trinkets, not meaning. They polluted the world with unused things, and eventually the goddess of rain washed them all away.

Third was Elopatiliztli the Blue Sun. She created people made of water. The Water People were tireless and immortal, but because they lived forever they soon flooded the world, threatening to plunge it back into the primordial sea from which it



came. They drowned the world beneath them, and eventually the god of wind blew them all away.

Next was Ehekamitotiani the White Sun. He created people made of wind. The Wind People were graceful and beautiful, but incredibly vain. They danced to and fro, caring for nothing but themselves and their fleeting beauty. Eventually the god of fire burned them all to ash.

Finally, under the rulership of Weysitlalin the Gold Sun, the gods created Humans. They created them by putting together the bones of all the previous people that had lived and brought them to life by sacrificing their own blood. From the bones of the first four Suns and the blood of the gods, First Man and First Woman were born at Tletoxiwakan, the birthplace of the Sun itself.



THE TONALTEKA

These two Humans had many children, and these children grew up to be the people we call the Tonalteka, the People of Light. They were noble and pious people who worshipped the gods, built beautiful things, sang beautiful songs, and discovered meaning in the world the gods created. The Tonalteka today are many families and many Houses, but in those days they all lived as One People.

Xolokwani, the jealous god of the Moon, hated how the Tonalteka lived together and whispered horrible things into their ears. He sowed discord and suspicion between the people, and set them against one another. He made the people fear each other, and the more people there were, the more fears they had. Over time, the One People became many people, many clans, many cities, many enemies, and many fears.

One day these enemies came together to fight.

THE FOUR PRIESTS, THE EATERS OF LIGHT

Before the war began, four Priests came before the armies and commanded them to stop. They said that the One People were not meant to fight each other or spill the blood of the gods. If they could not live in peace, then it was better to leave rather than fight.

The Priests instructed each tribe to leave the Valley, journey out into the world, and live apart from their brothers and sisters.

“You are the People of the Sun, great Tonalteka, and this great homeland was created for you. But you are no longer fit for this homeland! You are a day that has lasted too long. You are a Sun that lingers in the sky, burning the land with its heat and leaving it parched and dead. Suns cannot hang fearfully in the sky, and neither can you. Like the Sun, you must travel beyond this Valley and the ends of the Earth. Like the Sun you must journey through darkness and death.”

The Tonalteka were afraid to leave the Homeland. They asked the Priests if they would ever return. The Four Priests replied:

“Fear not, People of Light, for it is your fear that condemns you. You shall return to your Homeland and live within the great Mountains again. But first you must lose your fear and find your courage. Face the night bravely and wander the darkness without flinching. If you find strength and renewal on your journey, you shall rise again. If not, your deaths will give the gods strength to make a worthier people.”

The Four Priests then climbed to the top of Tleteoxiwakan and extinguished the sacred flame. The Valley went dark. As the Tonalteka walked away into the night, the Priests called out to them:

“When you have Light within your hearts again, you shall return and light a New Fire!”

TIME OF WANDERING, TIME OF NIGHT

The Tonalteka left the Valley and scattered across the four directions. They journeyed into the lands beyond, traveling farther than the eagle flies, farther than the Sun shines, farther than words can tell. Like the Sun journeying through the Underworld at night, the Tonalteka wandered through dark and cold places, through dry and thirsty places. They went far from the bright and blessed center of the world.

They met strange people in faraway lands and merged with those people. The One People became Many People and many families. The memory of the Valley faded into stories which melted into myths. The way back was forgotten, and great-grandchildren struggled to remember the tales of home. Struggled to believe them.

Some families abandoned their homeland entirely and settled in new lands. Other families mistook other lands for the homeland. They lied to themselves and their descendants, resigning themselves to sad and lonely lives. Still other families lost their way and died in the night.

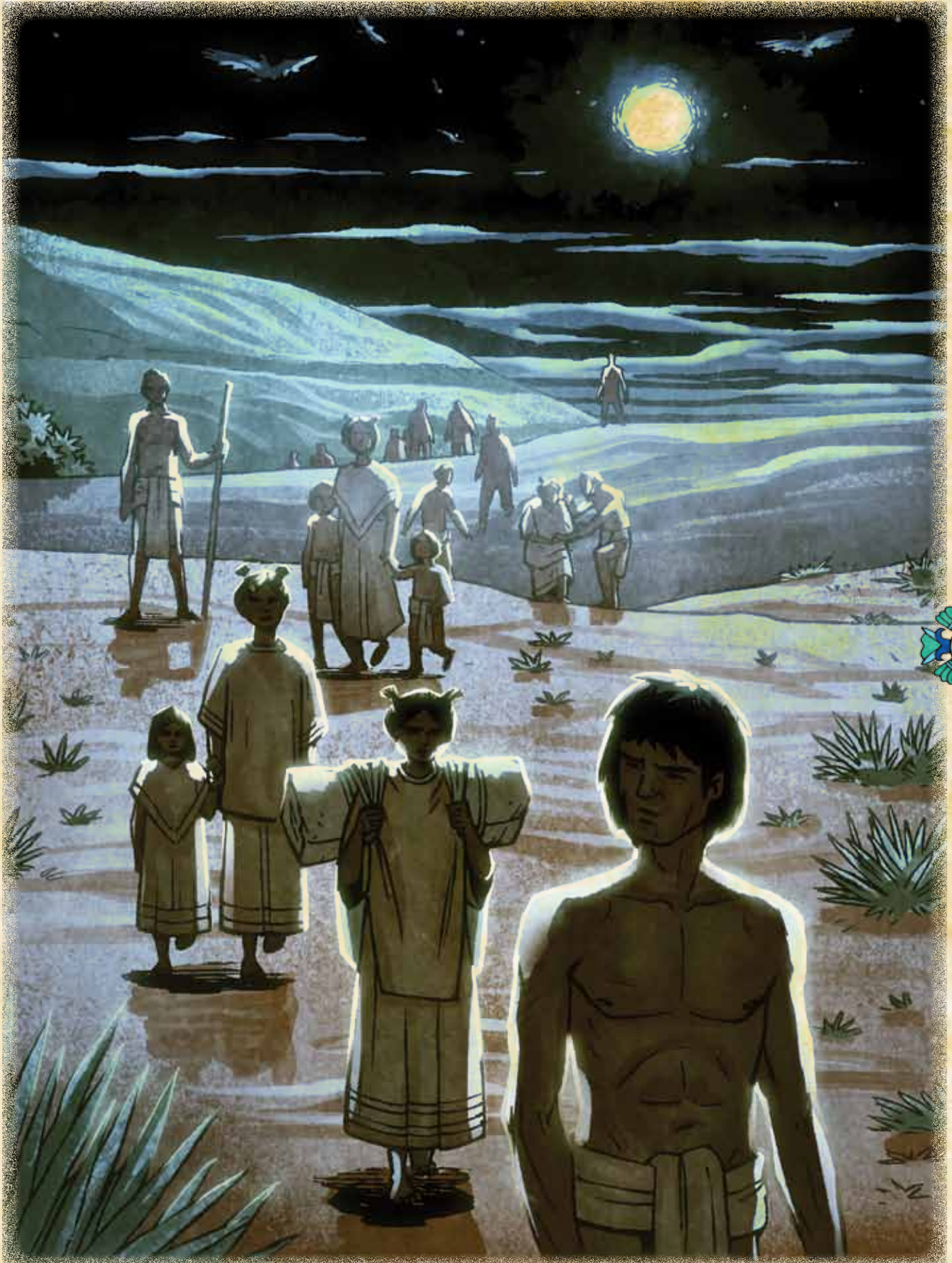
But a few families kept faith through the terrors and hardship. They forgot much of their homeland, but they kept their stories alive. They continued to perform their customs and rituals, and remembered to watch for signs and listen to their gods.



Everybody knows that the Tonalteka endured challenges and trials during the Time of Wandering, but the details of what happened exactly are unknown. Where did the Tonalteka go? Who did they meet? What did they do? Are there other Tonalteka still out there? Are there old enemies? What made the gods forgive some Tonalteka and lead them back to the Valley? What made them forsake any other still-lost Tonalteka?

Every storyteller has his or her own versions of the journey, and every Tonalteka house has its own secret beliefs. This is one of the great mysteries of New Fire, and exploring it can make for a wonderful story. The truth is yours to discover!







THE RETURN

We cannot know how many years the Tonalteka wandered or how long the night lasted. But one glorious day, the god Teoxotlani, son of the Sun and guardian of the sky, came to the priests of the faithful families and spoke through them.

"Every night the Sun battles her way through the darkness and fights her way to the dawn. So have you! You have faced your fears and hate, and you are ready to return. You have journeyed through Night, and now you must fight your way to Dawn! You have become the People of the Sun. Just as the Sun rises into Heaven, so shall you when you find your home!"

"Dawn will be the place where Heaven touches the Earth and creates a pathway into the sky. It will be the place where you float upon clouds, where Eagles soar beneath you, and where Weystlalin herself reaches down with her hand to lift you up. That is where you shall make your home!"

The people rejoiced. These were the words their hearts had longed to hear since the days before their parents were born. They left their fears and followed the priests, who had been touched by the gods and imbued with the knowledge of their ancestors. They followed them home to the Valley.

KAKAYAWANI, THE KINGDOM OF LIES

When the Tonalteka returned, they found the Valley overrun by foreigners from the west. The foreigners were strange people who spoke an unfamiliar tongue, but they had built great cities and called upon the powers of many gods. Some wondered if they were descendants of old Tonalteka families.

But if the foreigners were indeed long lost Tonalteka, they had changed much. They had forgotten the words of the Four Priests. They had succumbed to the Whispers of the Night.

The foreigners did not welcome the returning Tonalteka. They treated them as savages and vagabonds. They forbade them to own land, worship their gods, or enter any of their old temples and sacred places. The foreigners claimed that the land, the temples, and the ancient ancestors belonged to them alone. The Tonalteka called them the Kakayawani--Those who Lie.

The Kakayawani were powerful and numerous, so there was little room left in the Valley for the returning People of Light. The Tonalteka moved from city to city, serving the Kakayawani when they could and fleeing when they couldn't. They fought in Kakayawani wars and harvested Kakayawani food, yet no city would allow them to stay.

Even still, the Tonalteka never stopped watching for a sign that they had arrived at their promised home.

Eventually the Kakayawani had driven them from every single cities and village in the Valley. They chased the Tonalteka into Lake Ketzalatezkatl and trapped them on the small marshy is-

lands in the center--the only land in the Valley that the Kakayawani didn't want. The Kakayawani laughed at the Tonalteka, and left them to starve.

But then, in the center of the Lake, the Sun rose.

FOUNDING OF XOCHITLAN,

THE CITY ON THE LAKE

Remember now the joy of those who were there! Sing the story, o Tonalteka!

Xochisiwatzin (Flower Lady), the young daughter of the Tonalteka war chief, was the one who saw the sign that had been promised. She looked down into the mirror of the Lake and saw that the sky was stretched out beneath her in the reflection. She saw the clouds passing below her, while the eagle Tlapetantli, Son of the Wind God, soared beneath her feet. And as dawn broke over the eastern mountains she saw the hand of the Sun reach down and lift her and her people into the sky.

As we were lifted up into Heaven by the Sun, the voice of Teoxotlani echoed across the land:

"You have arrived at your Home, People of Light! You shall live here, at the Foundation of Heaven, the pathway to the gods, the place where Heaven meets the Earth! As you defend your home, so shall you defend Heaven. As Heaven is filled with wonder and beauty, so shall your home be filled with flowers and feathers and all the colors of creation. Build your city, my Soldiers of the Sky! At its heart, build a tall temple with many stairs--you will need them to descend back down to Earth!"

So the Tonalteka built a village on the islands. They named it Xochitlan (Land of Flowers) after the young girl who recognized the sign. They drove posts into the marsh and built platforms to provide space to live. They learned how to make gardens on the Lake, how to build islands on which to grow crops, and how to make Earth from Water. Xochitlan became known as a safe and convenient trading post, and people from all over the Valley brought their wares to sell.

More and more Tonalteka families returned to the Valley, and sought refuge in Xochitlan. The small village grew into a bustling city that spread over the islands and out into the Lake. The temple pyramid at the center of Xochitlan grew ever taller.

In time, Xochitlan became large, rich, and powerful. The Kakayawani watched it looming on the lake-sky like an approaching storm, and trembled before the People of Light.





NEW FIRE, DAWN OF THE TONALTEKA

For fifty two years, the Tonalteka waited, watched the calendars, and prepared for the Time of Change. For fifty two years, they endured the demands of the Kakayawani, paid them tribute, answered their calls to war, and bowed to their rulers. And for fifty two years they were forbidden to visit Tletoxiwakan, the holy city of their birth.

But after fifty two years, it was time for the next cycle to begin. It was the Time of Change. It was time to light the New Fire.

On the last night of the fifty two years of waiting, the Tonalteka assembled their army and marched into Tletoxiwakan. The Kakayawani Priests cursed them and commanded them to leave, but the People of Light were determined to reclaim the land of their ancestors.

They took the Priests captive and summoned all the other peoples of the Valley, the people of the Lake and the forests and the mountains and the rivers. They summoned all the other people who were servants of the Kakayawani. Then the noble Tonalteka warrior Ollin climbed atop the great volcano at Tletoxiwakan and spoke.

"This is the land of our birth. We are its rightful masters. For too long, we have wandered through darkness and dreams, through death and shadow. We are the People of the Sun--witness our dawn!"

Ollin brought forward Xochisiwatzin, the girl whose vision had founded Xochitlan. She was now an old woman and High Priestess of the Tonalteka, but she came without fear, bearing an obsidian knife. Ollin stretched himself over the altar, and Xochisiwatzin cut out his heart. She anointed herself and her followers with his blood. Then she placed a spindle inside Ollin's empty chest and lit a fire. The fire grew, consuming his body and casting its light across the assembled people.

Xochisiwatzin turned to face the people and spoke:

"Our fire now burns where we were born, where the Suns were born, where all true rulers were born. So long as it burns we shall be the masters of the Valley and the Earth. If you wish to pledge yourselves to us, you may live in our land. Simply light a torch from this fire and carry it back to your homes. Extinguish all the old fires, and light new ones with this flame."

She then turned to the Kakayawani Priests, who stood cowering



in the shadows. She pointed at them, and spoke again:

“Take this message back to your rulers: if they wish to submit, they must extinguish all light in their cities and come here themselves, barefoot and dressed in common clothes with a torch to take our fire. If they will live in our light, we shall welcome them as beloved children. But if they refuse, we shall drive them from our land like the night before the rising Sun!”

The Kakayawani heard the message, but they refused to submit. They sent their greatest armies to crush the Tonalteka. But the People of Light were as unstoppable as the dawn. With the fury of the gods from whom they descended, the Tonalteka drove the Kakayawani from the Valley, chasing them through the northwest pass, across the desert, and into the dark, desolate lands to the west.

And so it was that Empire of the Sun was born!

EMPIRE OF THE SUN

After the last Kakayawani fled, the Tonalteka claimed ultimate rulership over the Valley. They appointed two leaders. One was charged with protecting the nation, leading the armies, and speaking on behalf of all when dealing with outsiders. He was called the Wey Tlatoani, the Elder Speaker.

The other leader was charged with running the affairs of the Valley, acting as its supreme judge, distributing lands, rewarding those who served the Empire, and appointing lords and leaders. She was called the Tonalsiwatl, the Sun Lady.

DIFFERENT PEOPLE IN NEW FIRE

There are several groups/ethnicities in New Fire, and the differences between them are very important. However, it can be a little tricky to keep them all straight at first! Here is a quick list of the major groups featured in this story:

- Ancient/Ancestral Tonalteka (People of Light): The noble descendants of the gods who inhabited the Valley before the Time of Wandering. They were banished from the Valley and forced to wander when they allowed vice to consume them.

- Tonalteka (People of Light): The present day nobles who rule the Valley and claim to descend from the Ancestral Tonalteka. They are the Tonalteka who returned from the Time of Wandering.

- Kakayawani (Those Who Lie): The foreign people who moved into the Valley after the Ancestral Tonalteka left during the Time of Wandering. They were then driven out by the returning Tonalteka, but continue to battle them to this day.

- Tlalteka (Earth People): The commoners of the Valley who emerged from the land and the animals. They were ruled by the Ancestral Tonalteka and the Kakayawani, and are now ruled by the Tonalteka of today. They are humans, but unlike the Tonalteka they do not descend directly from the gods.



The Wey Tlatoani raised a great army to guard the Empire against invaders and bandits and wage war on neighboring lands to gather tribute, glory and worthy captives. The greatest Warriors heeded his call, and soon all enemies trembled before the mighty Empire of the Sun.

The Tonalsiawtl rewarded those who had fought alongside the Tonalteka with lands of their own commensurate with their valor and loyalty during the war. She also freed the Tlalteka (Earth People), the people of the Lake and mountains and forests and rivers who had served as subjects of the Kakayawani alongside the Tonalteka.

Under the Kakayawani, the Tlalteka had been serfs. They were confined to their villages and could not leave without permission from their Kakayawani lords. After helping the Tonalteka, they were free to move and travel. They could own and trade property, worship as they chose, collect tribute of their own, and rule their own cities, so long as they paid modest tribute to the Tonalteka and obeyed their just commands.

The Tonalteka reclaimed the old Kakayawani cities and temples. They built new temples and palaces over the old ones, entombing them like bodies returned to the Earth. But instead of expelling all the Kakayawani gods and idols, the Tonalteka adopted them. They placed their new idols alongside the old ones, which won favor with both. They also granted the gods of the Tlalteka homes and recognition. By welcoming all gods, the Empire soon grew powerful and blessed.

THE NEW CYCLE

The Empire is strong today, but it faces many challenges. The stronger it becomes, the greater the challenge. Such is the way of great nations.

Enemies lurk on all sides. Some, like the Kakayawani, seek vengeance. Others, such as the Tzatzini, are ambitious competitors for land, glory, and the favor of the gods. They see the growing Empire as prey. Still others, like the Alka'balum, have goals that are not yet clear.

Meanwhile, tensions are building within the Empire. The noble Tonalteka Houses scheme against each other. They strive for unity, but they struggle to resist the whispers of the Moon God who cultivates fear and suspicion between them.

The Tonalteka have given much to the Tlalteka, but many Tlalteka see their new freedom as an invitation to take more. They ask why they should be required to serve any masters at all.

And all across the land there are individual Temples, Warrior Houses, and tribes who strive to improve their circumstance. But they are running out of ways to do so without turning on each other.

Gods and spirits focus on the Valley with renewed interest.

They have given great power to the people there, but this power does not come without a price. The gods and spirits demand much in return, and human struggles are but passing smoke to them. But who can say what they will see in the growing Empire? Or what they will require of it?

Finally, there are still Tonalteka families out in the world beyond the Valley that have not yet returned. Will they seek a place in the Empire alongside their peers? Do they have Empires of their own, growing just beyond the horizon? Have they forgotten the old Tonalteka legends? Or do they remember something that the Tonalteka of the Empire have forgotten?

The lighting of the New Fire did not save the world. It cannot be saved. All one can do is allow it to continue.

And so the world of the Fifth Sun continues...



Each direction--East, South, West, and North--leads to a different world. Each world has its own landscape, its own people, and its own unique worldview. We can tell you the basic nature of these worlds, and give you clues to what you can expect to find. But you will undoubtedly find things you never expected, because these worlds are yours to fill in, discover, and invent. We will give you the backdrop, but the details are provided by you.



LANDS BEYOND THE VALLEY

The Valley is the center of New Fire. As Kwikatochtli said, it is the place where you were born. The Valley is your home, and all that you know is there. You can spend your entire life exploring and having adventures within the Valley, for it is vast and has many stories to find.

You may choose to explore the world beyond the mountaints, but know this: the farther you go from the Valley, the less defined reality becomes. There are a few maps of the outside world, but they are only rough sketches created by people who venture away from the Valley once a year. They cannot tell you what you will find on your journey. Rumor and legend are your only guides.

The world of Semanawak is as you see it when you stand on the ground. Mountains tower above you rather than stretching beneath you on a page. The shortest distance between two points is the river that connects them. Distances are measured in travel time and landmarks instead of miles or kilometers. There are no objective overhead maps, for only the gods see the world from the top down. All you can do is look in each direction, and listen to the stories of those around you.





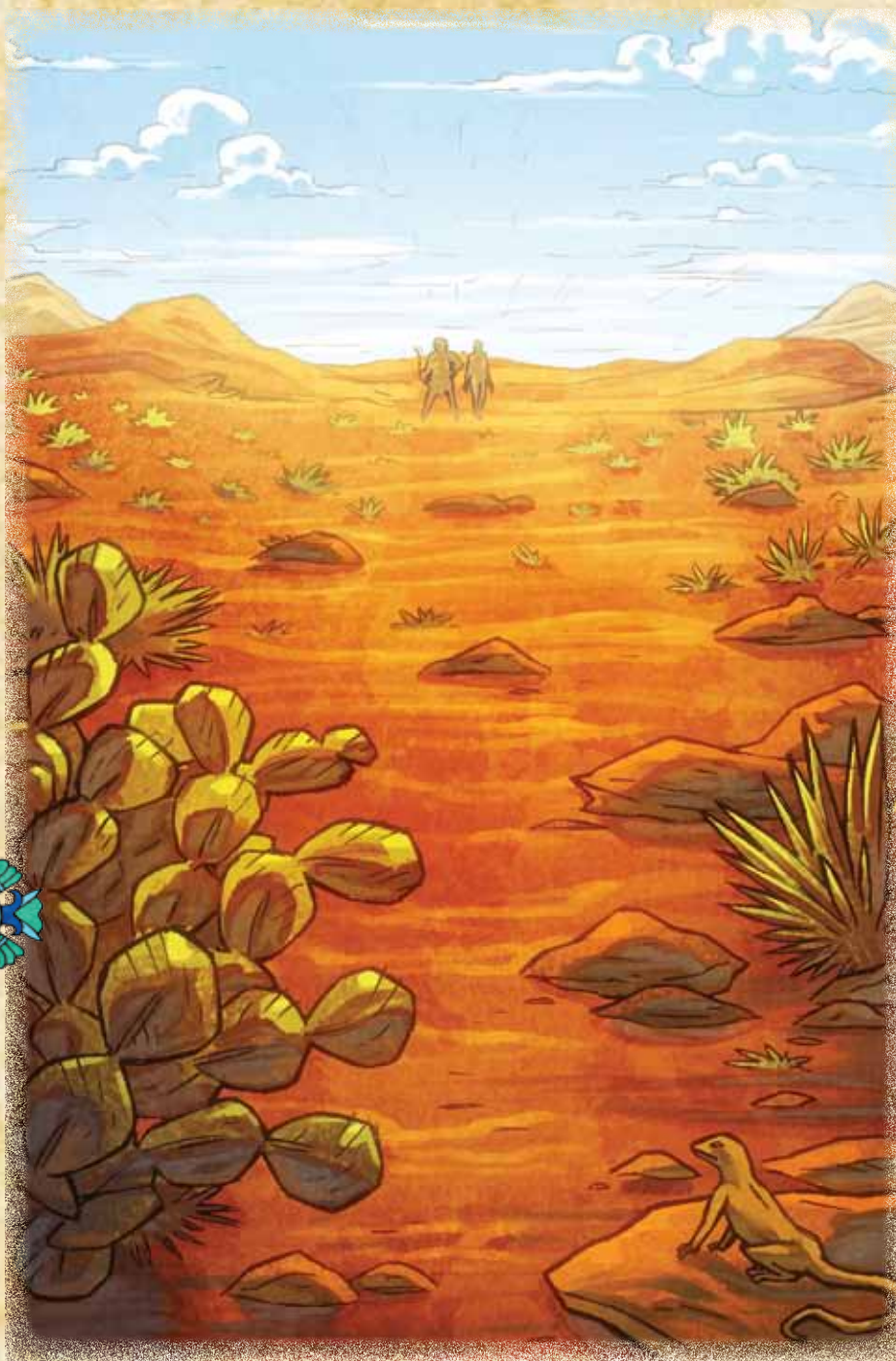
THE DESERT OF THE NORTH

Beyond the Valley's northern pass lies the Land of the Red Sun. It is the land of Oleletletl, the god of fire and war. Long ago, the world was inhabited by people made of fire and ash. The Fire People fought each other and burned the world to a cinder. Many believe that this happened in the Desert, and that war itself was invented there.

The Desert landscape is hard and unforgiving, alternating between regions of extreme flatness and extreme ruggedness. Sun-blasted rock and sand stretch into the horizon. The bare expanse is broken up by mountains, hills and volcano cones. Canyons and ravines open up unexpectedly in the ground. A variety of plants dust the expanses: creosote bush, sage brush, maguey, yucca plants, and various cacti such as prickly pear, barrel, and peyote.

Distance has a different meaning in the Desert. Boulders and mountains that look close enough to touch could be an entire day away. A traveler can watch storms pass over distant lands that would take a week to reach on foot, yet fail to see a snake near their foot before it bites him. In the Desert it is easier to see what is far away than it is to see what is close and immediate.

Travelers say that you are never so close to the sky as when you are lying beneath the stars in the Desert, with nothing between you and the Otherworlds. The sky is so deep you could almost fall into it. The Desert is also home to the Sky Islands, strange, beautiful mountains that



"I traveled into the Desert on a campaign. We were ordered to find a great Turquoise city that a merchant spoke of, so we could lead the army there and gain its tribute. We went to find and to gain, but we only succeeded in losing. Patli lost his eye to a nomad's arrow, Tepiltzin lost his foot to a monstrous lizard, and Chikawa lost his life to thirst.

You may think I am lucky because I returned home as a whole man. But I am not whole. I lost the most of all: my Tonali, my Courage. I dropped it there when I fled and left them behind.

Sometimes a hot breeze blows over the Sia Mountains, and

I can still hear the twang of the bowstrings, the roar of the lizard, the choking of brutal thirst, and my own shameful screams. I once dreamed of going back to reclaim what we lost, but the long hard years have taught me this:

That which the Desert takes is lost forever."

--Milintika (He is Waving), Beggar and former Warrior of Mixiwiliztlan





"The people of the Valley call the Desert desolate. They call it a land of misery and death. But the Desert has a life all its own. The plants and animals have the most ingenious ways of living, and the gods paint and sculpt their finest works upon the landscape. There is wisdom in the Desert, and if you know how to listen, you can hear its whispers, hear its songs."

--Momoztli (Altar), Midwife of Tlatlahako

attract water and are always hidden in clouds. They are said to be bridges to the sky and the cities that float on top of the clouds. In addition, many of the most spiritually powerful plants grow in the Desert. They may appear short and stubby, but they reach all the way up to the stars, just like the mountains.

You may find Desert lonesome and empty, but you are never alone. The creatures and spirits of the Desert are very different from those of the Valley. Just as a wooden spear is hardened by the fire, these creatures are hardened and sharpened by the blazing heat of the Desert. If you have something they want, and odds are you do, they will hunt you, poison you, or lure you to your death. Or they will simply wait for the land itself to overtake you.

Despite this, however, it would be wrong to call the Desert a hostile place. If you take the time to understand it, you will pass in safety and discover a land that hides nothing from you. Above all else, the Desert is indifferent. Your life means nothing to it. It will not go out of its way to kill you, but neither will it send any relief to you, no matter how great your need.

PEOPLE OF THE DESERT

Most Desert land cannot support a person for more than a short while. Consequently, most people of the Desert are nomadic. They migrate from place to place throughout the year in small tribal bands.

Valley people consider the Desert people barbarians and lump them all together, derisively calling them Katzawak (Dirty). Although they share a homeland, each Desert tribe has its own unique customs, beliefs, and language. They also practice many different ways of life.

Some are small scale hunter-gatherers. They move every few weeks, following game and collecting plants along the way. Others are seasonal nomads that move between several established camps. For the most part, there is insufficient water in the Desert to support agriculture, but the Katzawak often encourage beneficial plants to grow in certain areas and return once or twice a year to collect the wild harvest.

Still other tribes are almost sedentary. They inhabit villages and small cities near water sources such as springs and Sky Is-

lands. Such oases are rare, but they have rich volcanic soil and enough water to support farms.

The most feared of the Katzawak, however, are the Raiders. They are called Tzatzini, or Screaming Ones. They prey on other humans, sweeping through encampments to take food, supplies, and slaves. Their most common targets are other Katzawak, but some bands of Tzatzini raid the Valley on a semi-regular basis. They sneak or fight past the northern fortress or cross the Sia Mountains to plunder the Empire's small villages and towns.

Fortunately for the Empire, the Tzatzini spend as much time fighting each other as they spend raiding. Although they are legendary Warriors, they are not organized enough to form a large band and overtake a city. Generals of the Empire shudder when they think about what would happen if someone unified the Tzatzini.

TRADE

The Desert is a brutal, dangerous place, but its many treasures entice merchants from afar. Several exotic medicines and beauty products are made exclusively from plants and animals of the Desert: cactus and sage, peyote, beaded lizard bile, agave teeth, and so on. The Desert's more ferocious creatures are also sought after to display as trophies or in zoos, and to sacrifice in religious ceremonies. But turquoise is by far the most beloved trade good in the Desert.

Few people know where to find Desert turquoise, and those who do keep it a secret. The Katzawak bring curiously great amounts to trade, and merchants who ply the northern routes also return with large bounties. But both groups remain smugly silent about their sources. Rumors abound. Some say that the turquoise comes from a lost Tonalteka city far to the north. Others say there is a spring where turquoise literally bubbles from the ground or that it is harvested from giant lizards with turquoise scales. Regardless of its origins, turquoise always fetches a high price.

Great fortunes can be made in the Desert.. It lures the brave and foolish alike to try their luck in the Land of the Red Sun.





THE JUNGLE OF THE SOUTH

If you travel through the southern pass of the Valley, you will soon come to a great cliff. At the bottom of this cliff are the lowlands of the great Southern Jungle, Garden of the Blue Sun, of Elopatiliztli, the goddess of rain. It stretches before you like a roiling green sea and disappears into a great mist in the distance. Even on the clearest, driest days, nobody has ever seen the far edge of the Jungle. Like the ocean, it goes to the horizon and beyond.

The cliff is cut with winding paths and trails created by villagers and merchants. It is a harrowing climb that takes an entire day going down and at least two days coming up. Vines, moss, and an endless variety of clinging plants cover the cliff face and house abundant birds and insects. These creatures are said to be the sentries of the Jungle, for they always scatter at the approach of an outsider and vanish into the trees as if to alert others.

After descending the treacherous cliff face, travelers are greeted by the din of the forest. Birds, monkeys, frogs, insects, and creatures unknown sing their never ending song. During the day, the noise is just a hum. It is loud compared to calm stillness of the Valley highlands but otherwise tolerable. When night falls, the voices begin to shriek and scream like Warriors on a battlefield. Travelers never sleep during their first night in the Jungle, they can only lie awake in fear.

The Valley is a bright place. The Sun cuts through the thin air and clear skies, and even the clouds cannot stop her light. The Jungle, on the other hand, is dark. The tall trees of the canopy tower above like the roof of a great house and cover everything in a dark, mysterious gloom. Only a few shards of sunlight get through.

The jungle floor teems with wonderful, terrible life. The variety of plants is beyond reckoning; if you learn a thousand different varieties, you will be but



"Touch one thing in the Jungle, and everything else reacts. Push aside a branch, and the ants that live in the tree will attack you. Hunt an animal, and a bigger one will come to steal it from you. Trip over a root, and the monkeys in the trees will mock you endlessly. Perhaps we shouldn't wonder why we have such trouble when fighting the Alka'balum. When we attack them, the entire forest reacts..."

--Tonawak (One Who Possesses Light), Eagle Warrior of Teoyezteko



a beginner. The creatures are ravenous and ruthless, and anything softer than stone that falls on the floor will be devoured in a matter of hours. There are countless creatures of countless types, all of them fighting and scratching at each other, but they seem to move as one.

The landscape shifts around like the surface of the Lake. Cities and landmarks vanish into the trees, then to emerge ten years later as though they had never left. Sometimes they return as ruins or do not return at all. Occasionally new cities and ruins appear, full of mysteries and contradictions. Rivers twist and coil like snakes on the hunt, waiting in one place for days and then slithering away. Plants grow and move as you watch. Entire lifetimes begin and end every day.

Nothing is constant in the Jungle. Nothing is still. Every moment is different than the last, but somehow also familiar, because it repeats every day, every week, or every lifetime. Time in the Jungle is rhythmic, loud moments wrapped in silence like the beats of a drum. Each life in the Jungle is a drum, a pattern playing alongside the others, and while each repetition is unique, with slightly different timing and variance, the shape of the pattern, and the shape between the patterns, is the true landscape of the Jungle.

One such pattern is the Rain. It is said that the Jungle is home to one of Elopatiliztli's greatest sorrows because the Rain Goddess goes there almost every day to weep. Her tears flood the Jungle so abruptly that newcomers often panic. Trapped within the dense foliage and thick canopy, you fully expect to drown in the downpour. Then, as suddenly as they started, the rains pass and the Sun returns.

As with many things in the Jungle, the Rain is frightening at first. It is strange words in an unfamiliar language, spoken with urgent insistence. But after a while, you will come to find the daily rains to be calming and refreshing. You learn to understand the words: 'I have something to share with you.' And you grow to hear not insistence, but eagerness.

"Never forget the lesson we learned so long ago: the Jungle is a garden, and somebody planted it."

--Kozamalotl (Rainbow), Corn Priestess of Mixiwilztlán

PEOPLE OF THE JUNGLE

The people of the Jungle are called the Alka'balum--Jaguar Chasers. But the origin of their name--and nearly everything else about these people--is a deep and unsettling mystery.

On the surface, the Alka'balum share many things in common with the people of the Valley. They grow maize, build pyramid temples, and worship similar gods. But though the Alka'balum gods look the same, they have different names, personalities, and blessings. Although the Alka'balum pyramids and monuments look similar to those in the Valley, they are used for different purposes. Everything has a familiar shape but an alien nature. It is almost as if both the Valley and the Alka'balum

learned of these things from someone else, and came to two completely different sets of conclusions.

Though they appear to share a common culture, the Alka'balum are actually many different peoples with many different lineages. They live in cities, some of which rival the great urban centers of the Valley, but there is no capital. Each city is independent, ruling over a swath of territory under the leadership of a Jaguar King (named so for the beautiful jaguar skin mantles they wear to mark their status) and a small group of noble elites. The cities often wage war on each other and they seldom forge alliances because they prize independence over greater might.

The elites of the Alka'balum are regal and sophisticated, the equals of any noble from the Empire. Their ways are strange, but they pride themselves on their grace and civility. But unlike the nobles of the Empire, their authority extends beyond the social realm. They are also masters of the land, recognized by the trees, the rivers, the mountains, and the animals. When they speak, the Jungle itself obeys.

Jaguar Kings are not just rulers. They are also sorcerers who have a mysterious, powerful link to the Jungle, a link formed long ago that is passed down to successors. When armies from the Valley march against them, their cities sail through the Jungle like boats on a great green ocean. When a Jaguar King's city is attacked, he commands the entire Jungle to fight back.

While the greatest power belongs to the Jaguar Kings and their nobles, all Alka'balum possess an uncanny affinity for the Jungle. The trees bend down to offer them fruit, part to let them pass, and close behind them in order to hinder pursuers. Skeptics scoff at such claims, and insist that the Alka'balum are simply familiar with their environment. But none who have returned from a campaign in the Jungle have remained skeptics.

TRADE

The Jungle is a source of tremendous wealth. Many of the most valuable goods come from the verdant lowlands to the south: cocoa, rubber, gum, jade, beautiful birds and feathers, powerful medicines, and more. Several of the goods that define nobility in the Valley actually come from the Jungle, and possessing them is a symbol of conquest and dominance. The Alka'balum are usually willing to trade with merchants from the Valley, but they are notoriously moody and unpredictable, and have been known to break off relations and fade into the Jungle at the slightest offense.

The Empire has managed to secure tribute from a few Alka'balum cities. Their Warriors are fierce and the Jaguar Kings' power is great, but they are not immune to the forces of the Empire. However, it is extremely difficult for the Empire to enforce these obligations. After one or two payments, the Alka'balum attempt to throw them off and disappear into the mist. Many of the Empire's finest Warriors have died trying to keep hold of these sources of fantastic wealth.





KAKAYAWANITLAN, LAND OF LIARS

Far to the west, over the Choka mountains and lurking in the land of dusk, lies Kakayawanitlan, homeland of the Kakayawani, the old oppressors of the Valley and eternal enemies of the Empire. Though the Tonalteka and their Tlalteka allies drove them out of the Valley, the Kakayawani continue to live and prosper to the west. They plot their revenge and occasionally launch raids on the Valley.

The Choka mountains are dangerously rugged and virtually impassable. To enter Kakayawanitlan, travelers from the Empire must venture north of the Valley and across the Desert to a narrow, treacherous pass. This pass is guarded by a Kakayawani fortress known as Apanotlan, The Land That None Pass. As the name suggests, no one from the Empire has ever successfully passed through it. Countless wars have been waged there, but Apanotlan still stands strong.

There are rumors of other ways into Kakayawanitlan--secret passes through the Choka mountains, hidden cave tunnels, and even a secret route through the Jungle. The Kakayawani have launched wars in the Jungle against the Alka'balum, and once attempted to invade the Empire through the southern

pass, so they must know other routes. But nobody from the Empire has yet discovered another way into Kakayawanitlan.

Almost nothing is known about Kakayawanitlan. It is said that the Kakayawani control a vast empire comprised of many cities across many lands reaching all the way to the distant western coast. Their capital is supposedly a dark reflection of Xochitlan that is built on its own lake in its own Valley far away. It is said to contain great riches, including some lost Ancient Tonalteka relics. But nobody from the Empire has ever seen it, except those taken as captives to be sacrificed.

PEOPLE OF KAKAYAWANITLAN

There are no objective opinions of the Kakayawani. They are the enemies of the Empire, responsible for ages of oppression in the Valley and for countless treacherous raids. They are universally hated and seen as cruel, deceitful, and sadistic. A few wonder whether the old atrocities of the Kakayawani are exaggerated today, and suspect that the Tonalteka might be strengthening their own power by directing hate at an outside foe. But to most, the Kakayawani are demons who walk the Earth.





The Kakayawani are the “bad guys” of New Fire, and storytellers in the Empire love to play them up as evil and menacing. Tellers fearfully whisper of terrible rituals and pacts with dark and deadly gods. They grimly describe the monstrous, inhuman qualities of Kakayawani Warriors, and hint that they are demons hiding inside human skin. They frantically warn of the horrors that await if and when the Kakayawani ever retake the Valley. The Kakayawani are shadows in the night, and people see whatever they are afraid of when they look at those shadows.

But you will have to discover for yourself what is casting those shadows. Is it really a monster? Or is it just another human dressed in an animal costume?

The Kakayawani are hated enemies, but they are also worthy ones. They are deadly and dangerous and they demand the Empire’s full attention. They are rich, their Warriors are skilled and cunning, and their Priests call upon powerful gods of disaster and destruction. The Empire’s wars other peoples are fought for gain, glory, and the gods, but those fought against the Kakayawani are for survival. To the extent that fear is a form of respect, the Empire greatly respects the Kakayawani.

TRADE

The Kakayawani and the Empire are enemies. The only trades they make are lives and captives on the battlefield.

A few brave merchants have attempted to enter Kakayawanitlan to seek the forbidden goods and valuable intelligence. Few ever return. The journey over the Choka mountains is perilous, even for experienced mountain climbers, and the Kakayawani are merciless when dealing with intruders.

Copper is the most coveted resource in Kakayawanitlan. It is rare in most of Semanawak but oddly abundant in Kakayawanitlan. The enemy makes good use of this advantage by incorporating copper into their armor and equipment as well as their art. Their copper swords and spears are particularly fearsome. Skilled copper runners can make a fortune smuggling it over the Choka mountains, but such successes are rare.

EASTERN CRESCENT

The glittering Eastern Crescent lies at the bottom of the Dawning Cliffs east of the Kochewa mountains. It is a lowland delta, a fertile and watery land where seven great rivers converge and meet with the ocean. The rivers are always full, even during the Dry Season. During the Wet Season, they flood and turn large swathes of surrounding land into marshes. Water connects the land, allowing heavy boat traffic between inland villages and islands off the coast.

The coast is very much the center of this region. It is like the palm of a great hand, holding all the wealthiest and most prosperous settlements of the region. The rivers are like great fingers reaching from the ocean, drawing people and goods towards it.

One finger stretches north towards the Desert, carving a gigantic canyon into the high plateau and bringing in turquoise.

Two fingers reach towards the Valley but fail to pass through the mountains. Their waters cascade down the eastern slopes of the Kochewa mountains, collecting sediment to nourish inland farms and transporting farmers to coastal markets. Four fingers extend into the Jungle, reaching to parts unknown and bringing back feathers, cocoa, and all the treasures of the south.

However, land is only part of the Eastern Crescent. Many people there call the ocean their home. They travel up and down the coast to visit and trade with the seaside settlements. Then they venture out across the waves to seek out exotic goods from the many surrounding islands. Some of these islands are visible from land, while others are many days’ journey from the coast.

Such travel is extremely dangerous, for the oceans are home to primordial horrors from the days of Sipaktli. Great swimming mouths, crushing tentacles, fish with spears on their faces, and other creature too bizarre to comprehend lurk beneath the waves, hungering for those who live on the surface. Most people from the Valley refuse to go near the ocean, so it is a testament to the bravery and skill of the seafarers that they go out on it every day. But even the people of the coast prefer not to venture out of sight of the land, and they only do so when necessary.

PEOPLE OF THE EASTERN CRESCENT

The people of the Eastern Crescent are known as the Maiteka (Hand People), but this single name does not do justice to the variety of cultures living there. It is a convenient term for those speaking about the region as a whole, but travelers beware: there are deep, meaningful differences between the tribes and villages of this region and they do not take kindly to being grouped together--especially with their enemies!

In the Crescent, each river is like a nation unto itself. Strands of small villages cling to each river like pearls on a string. The villages are home to hunters, gatherers, and farmers who grow valuable cash crops to trade on the coast. There are large trading centers at the mouth of each river, where inland villages and seafaring traders meet and do business. Villages on the same river are neighbors, even when they are separated by great distances. Villages on other rivers are suspicious strangers and often enemies.





Despite the great wealth of the Crescent, there are few large settlements that would be considered cities by the people of the Valley. Even the trading centers are more like markets than cities. There are small, permanent populations of elites and Warriors who guard them against violent outsiders and extract tribute from the traders. All others are visitors seeking to trade.

The Tonalteka look down on the Trade-Nobles of the Crescent because they have few soldiers and rarely launch attacks. But they are among the richest nobles in Semanawak, and wield considerable influence. More than a few Tonalteka have sheepishly come to the Trade-Nobles during times of hardship to ask for loans or even beg for outright charity.

The Crescent looks like a relatively peaceful place. Aside from periodic invasions by the Empire, there are few all-out wars. But like an eerily calm sea, there is a lot churning under the surface. The river-nations are very factionalized and hostile towards one another, and there is a long history of feuds between individual villages. One launches a raid against another for some historic offense, which provokes retaliation, which in turn provokes another retaliation, and so forth.

Though only a few die in each raid, they have claimed an astonishing number of lives over time. These low-key back and forth conflicts can last for years. At any given time, there are several such skirmishes raging across the Crescent.

The Trade-Nobles disapprove of these destructive conflicts, but they have little power to stop them. Their soldiers are occupied with keeping peace in the trade ports,

which is no small task with so many tribes in such close proximity, so there nobody left to police the rivers. Additionally, the feuds have long since stopped being about concrete things, like hunting territory or cash crops, so the Trade-Nobles can't even use their commercial power to sanction the villages into submission. It is a regrettable situation, but there are few involved who have the ability or the interest in fixing it anytime soon.

TRADE

The Eastern Crescent has the richest concentration of trade goods in Semanawak. Aside from the goods it collects from other regions, cotton and vanilla are its two biggest exports. They are sought after by every other settlement in the world. It is a source of valuable shells, used to create jewelry, tools, and musical instruments. Tobacco, which thrives in the higher and drier areas of the Crescent, is also plentiful here. Traders from the islands bring a dizzying array of spices and plant products—allspice, annatto, nutmeg, and many others.

Unlike most people in Semanawak the Maiteka eat little maize. Instead, they rely on jungle root crops such as manioc, as well as fruits such as starfruit, guava, and papaya, which are enthusiastically traded for on the coast.

Though the majority of trade goods are plant or animal in origin, there are also many finished goods that find their way to the coast: pottery, jewelry, tools, weapons, amulets, and even mysterious idols from faraway lands. Many such items originated far beyond lands known to the people of the Valley, and are found nowhere else in Semanawak.



THE STAR KING

The Crescent was not always a place of such infighting. According to legend, there was once a great city on the coast that ruled the Crescent and united the 7 rivers as one (much like Tleteoxiwkan in the Valley). This city was ruled by a famously wise king and judge, who mediated disputes between the villages and gave them justice with both peace and honor. Under his rulership and judgement, the Crescent thrived.

But one day a great bleeding star appeared in the sky. It was a comet, a bringer of doom and destruction. Terror spread across the land as astrologers grimly reported that the comet was certain to hit the Crescent. The impact would be tremendous, consuming most in terrible flames. Afterwards, ten thousand jaguars would pour forth and devour everyone who remained, leaving nothing but blood and corpses for the rest of eternity.

In order to save his people, the king declared that he would sail into the sky to stop the comet. He boarded a huge boat and headed off into the ocean, bearing a huge, bright torch to light his way. He vanished into the distance. It is said that he reached the edge of Semanawak, where the sea meets the sky, and entered into the heavens above. As the people watched

the sky they saw a bright star move up from the horizon and towards the comet. As it crossed the comet's path, this new star vanished.

At first, the people feared that their King had perished, but as the days went by, the comet passed harmlessly overhead. The impact was averted, and the Crescent was spared.

Nobody knows what happened to the wise king. His star vanished after it crossed the comet, and none have been able to find it since. Some say that he sacrificed himself to the god in the comet in order to gain mercy. Others say that he remains in the sky, still protecting his people from the dangers above and guiding wayward sailors back home. Others say that he will return some day to reclaim his city and restore it to its former glory.

Only ruins of the city remain today. It sits at the mouth of one of the rivers that snakes out of the Jungle, deserted and empty but revered by all the Maiteka. It is considered a zone of peace, and none will fight in or around it. It is a popular pilgrimage destination for the troubled and the bereaved, but few dare to remain for long. Those that do tend to vanish without a trace, claimed by the ruins themselves.



BEYOND

The four earthly directions see the majority of travelers, but there is a fifth one: the Axis Mundi, the vertical, the connection between Sky, Earth, and Underworld where all the compass point intersect. It is nearly impossible for humans to travel the Axis Mundi because they are creature of the Earth, who cannot fly or burrow into the ground. For most, attempting such a journey is fatal--a leap from a cliff, or burial alive. But there are places where the levels of the universe connect, and there are some who have glimpsed the worlds beyond.

Caves connect to all of the realms within the Earth, including the Underworld and a thousand unique pockets within. There are stories of people who journeyed into caves and met ancestors long dead, discovered entire underground cities inhabited by talking rabbits and worms, or found lost camps of Fire People still fighting the wars of the Red Sun.

Caves are also pathways through the Earth, like the tunnels made by some great worm eating through a piece of fruit. Some travelers have entered caves in the Valley only to emerge deep in the Desert or the Jungle. Some have ended up deep in the tombs within the temple pyramids. Some have found caves leading up to the sky. Some have even found cave tunnels through time itself that lead to the distant past and previous Suns, or to the murky and uncertain future.

Like caves mountaintops are places where the barrier between worlds is thin. There are many levels of the Sky, and tall mountains poke up through one or more of them. Those who walk in the world where Eagles fly may suddenly hear them speak. Those who stand at level with the rising Sun might see the heroes of history escorting her through the Sky. Those who enter into the turbulent Sky of Storms might be challenged by heavenly Warriors who shoot lightning in place of arrows and wield clubs made of thunder.

Clouds are the most visible landmarks of the Skies. It is said that each cloud is home to a miniature world that exists on top. Some are great white plains where feathered deer graze and feathered fish swim through rivers of rain. Others are misty mountains within the sky, reaching still higher. Some are vast battlegrounds where Storms fight against Hummingbirds. And some are huge cities inhabited by Vulture People, ruled by Hawks, and protected by off-duty Sun Warriors who wage war against other cloud cities.

On the very tallest mountains you can reach the stars themselves. Some say that the stars are the campfires of heavenly travelers, and that those who reach them may sit and speak with beings from other times and other places as they journey through the cosmos. Others say that the stars are the luminous twins of those on Earth, distant glowing reflections in the great obsidian mirror that is the night sky. Still others say that the stars are simply holes in the sky through which some great light shines from beyond.

The Skies are not static. They drift and float like the clouds, dropping low some days and rising unreachably high on others. Some days a mountain may reach all the way up to the stars. Other days you will find it an empty, lonely, desolate point high above the Earth but still far below the Sky. The surest sign that a mountain is touching the sky is when its peak is hidden within the clouds.

There are worlds beyond Earth, beyond Semanawak and all that is familiar there. But for every true story there are a thousand lies told by charlatans, braggarts, and madmen. It is not easy for a human to leave the Earth, and only the most diligent will discover the way. Of course, the twin of diligence is foolishness, and few who seek the worlds beyond are anything but fools. Caves and mountaintops are home to powerful spirits. They pass through these places on their travels through the universe, and there is almost always a Gatekeeper. But humans are rarely welcome in the Beyond. If you are lucky, you will simply be ignored.

Otherwise, the Earth will swallow your pleas for mercy and the Wind will carry your moans of sorrow for the rest of eternity.





THE FIVE SUNS LEGEND

PART 1

As told by Teoxiwitl (Precious Turquoise), Singing Priestess of Ilwikakalko.

Gather round, People of the Sun, for you know not your history! You know not where you come from and how! You are statues believing you arose whole and finished from the soil! You eat your tortillas as though maize was always grown and ground! You are children knowing not how your house was built, how your food was made, or how your parents have bled to bring them to you! But listen closely, oh People, and you shall hear the glorious tale of the Sun in the sky and the four Suns that were there before!

DARKNESS OVER ALL

Long ago, the gods were floating up in the sky, gazing over the lands they had created. There were six gods: Oleletlel the Great Warrior, missing his foot from battle; Itztechiwani the Crafty Schemer, with a smooth mirror face of polished obsidian; Elopatiliztli the Flayed Farmer, with torn flesh like husks of harvested maize and hair like the fairest cornsilk; Ehekamitotiani the Noble Eagle, with plumed feathers of all colors known and imagined; Xolokwani the Treacherous Scavenger, small and weak with the eyes of a traitor; and Weysitlalin the Timid Doe, wise and observant but so quiet that none could ever hear her wisdom.

In those days the skies were dark, for there was no Sun. In those days, the lands were barren and empty, for there was no maize and no trees. There were no animals and no people. Man and Woman had not yet been invented.

FILL THE VOID

As the gods bickered over what to do with their world, Itztechiwani, the cleverest and craftiest of the heavens, schemed aloud:

“This is a fine world, but it is empty. We have made land, but there is nothing to dwell in it, nothing to grow in it, nothing to worship us, nothing to strive. How may we sustain ourselves on emptiness? We must make creatures to inhabit our world.”

All agreed that a world without creatures would not bring them closer to completion, nor further from hunger. Weysitlalin murmured something softly, but no one else heard her, so they assumed she also agreed. Itztechiwani spoke again:

“Then let us all make creatures to inhabit our world. Surely we are capable of such a thing? We are gods, and we carry within us divinity, and what is divinity if not the ability to create something out of nothing?”

SCULPTORS OF LIFE

So the gods created creatures. Ehekamitotiani created the Eagle from his feathery plumes, a majestic creature with fierce talons to soar the skies of the new world. Elopatiliztli created the Alligator from the sharp teeth of the land that stuck into her flayed skin, a dutiful creature with both ferocity and serenity to guard the rivers of the new world against those who might befoul them.

Itztechiwani created the Jaguar, a cunning and relentless creature of infinite cleverness to stalk the earth and dispatch any who let their guard down. Oleletlel created the Wolf, a loyal soldier in the army of the pack, capable of defeating any opponent through strength and unceasing discipline.

Xolokwani created the Vulture, a secretive scavenger sly enough to earn a living safely and luxuriously from that which others would abandon from lack of vision. Weysitlalin created the Deer, a wise and watchful creature that crept softly through the world, ever cautious and ever wary but also ever aware of the location of the best food.

And so these gods created many creatures, and before long the world was teeming with life. The gods looked upon their works, and were pleased. Weysitlalin murmured something softly, but no one else heard her, and so they assumed she was also pleased. Itztechiwani spoke again:

“We have made a fine world, and many fine creatures to dwell there. Perhaps we shall find sustenance among them? Let us ask them to pay their respects to we who have created them. As we have birthed them, so should they provide for us.”

VOICES BUT NO WORDS

So the gods spoke to the animals and asked for their respect. But the animals replied with all manner of screeches and clucks and roars, each one speaking its own tongue, none understanding each other and none understanding their divine parents, or what their mothers and fathers asked of them. The gods were sad at their failure, for though they had created many wondrous things, their creations would never speak back to them, never grow beyond their natures. In their sadness they began to bicker again...



THE EMPIRE OF THE SUN



The Empire of the Sun is a powerful alliance of city-states that are ruled by the three Tonalteka Houses. The city of Xochitlan is the unquestioned capitol of the Empire, and it is supported by two other Tonalteka-lead cities: Mixiwiliztlan and Teoyezteko. These three Ruling Cities collect yearly tribute from all the other cities in the Empire in the form of goods, resources, services, and soldiers.

Beneath the three Ruling Cities are the three Allied Cities: Ilwikakalko, Popokatetlan, and Tlatlahako. These cities are ruled by lesser Tlalteka nobles, and must pay tribute and service to the Tonalteka cities. However, the Allied Cities are highly respected because of their support against the Kakayawani, and get a say in the affairs of the Empire. Their primary obligation is to support the Ruling Cities in war, a duty that brings substantial rewards of wealth and land. Otherwise, they may live as they please.

All the other cities in the Empire are known as the Tributary

Cities. They are required to pay large tributes, contribute soldiers, provide large amounts of food and building resources, and often supply laborers as well. They do not get a say in the affairs of the Empire, and must simply go along with what the Ruling and Allied Cities decide.

While the tribute and service obligations are onerous, the Tributary Cities are otherwise left alone to govern themselves with minimal interference. So long as they pay their tribute, the Empire does not meddle in their internal affairs.

In exchange for their tribute, subjects are inducted into the powerful and dynamic culture of the Empire, a diverse mixture of commerce, politics, and religion. They may trade goods and stories from all over the world. They receive protection from external threats. They can earn glory and prestige through service to the Empire (the service is required, but exceptional performance is richly rewarded). And they also gain access to well-maintained temples and large Priestly Orders who will see to their spiritual needs.

Some people revere the Empire, and find that its benefits outweigh its obligations. Some communities actively seek membership in order to be linked into its vast trade network. Others despise the Empire, and see it as oppressive, brutal, and unjust. Most fall somewhere in between. As with all things, one's individual perspective and experience shapes one's mindset.



"The Empire of the Sun is the center of Semanawak. It is the cup into which all waters flow, the flame from which all light streams, and the place where Heaven meets Earth. It is the heart that beats for the world. It is the perspective from which the stories of your life are told.

There are as many peoples in Semanawak as there are waves upon the Great Waters. We have met some of them. Some we have only heard about. Others are still out there, waiting to find you or be found by you. They have their own stories, their own lives, and their own perspectives.

But you were born in the Empire.

You cannot choose where you are born. You see the world with the eyes you were given. You may look at what you wish, see what you wish, and flee from everything you find familiar. But you will always see with the eyes of your home. And your home is the Empire.

It is the heart that beats within you."

--Nekawal (Survivor), Tlamatini of Xochitlan



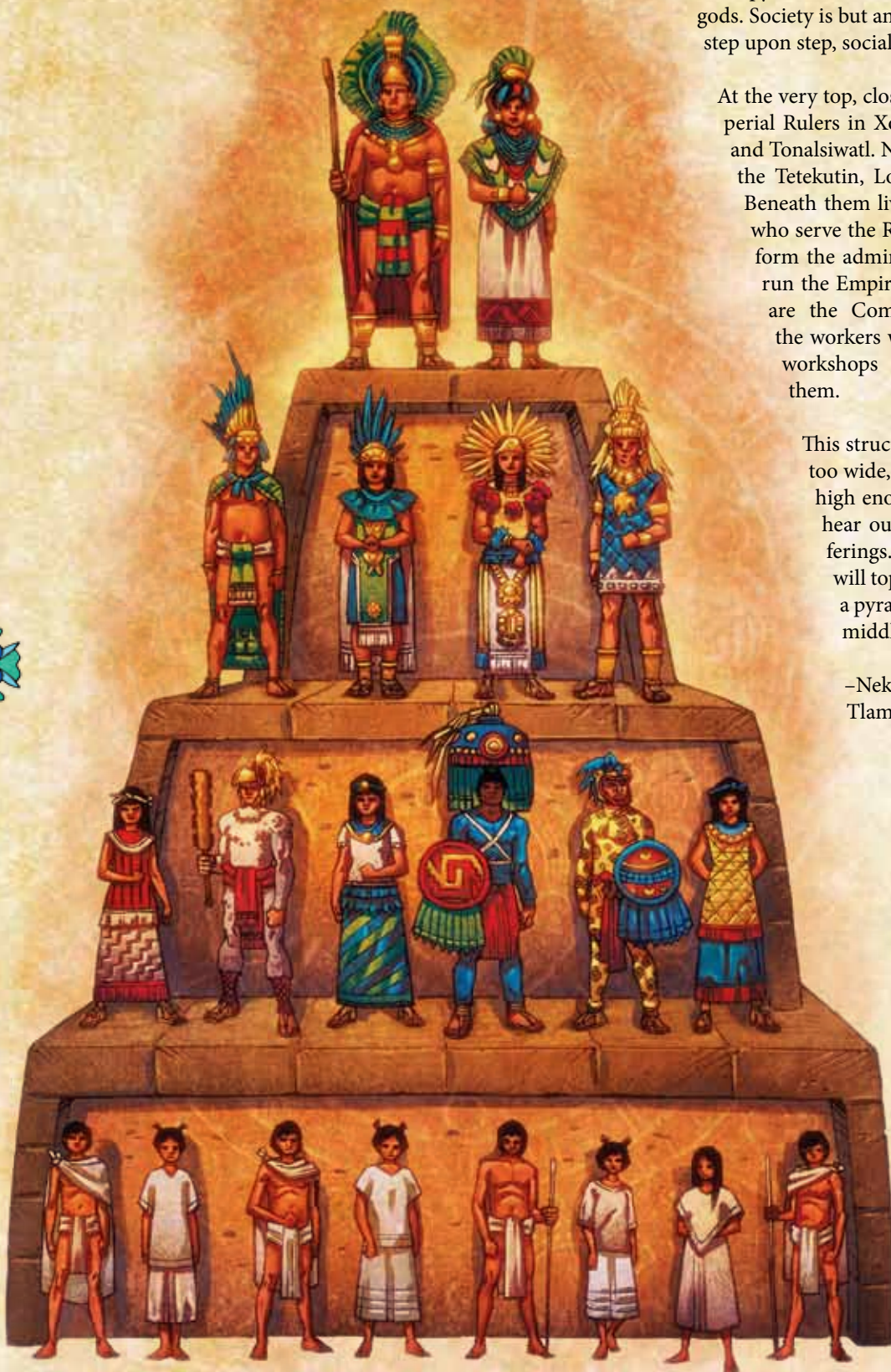
THE SACRED PYRAMID OF SOCIETY

“At the center of each city there is a temple pyramid, a pyramid that allows us to do our duty to the gods. Society is but an extension of this pyramid, step upon step, social class upon social class.

At the very top, closest to the Sun, are the Imperial Rulers in Xochitlan, the Wey Tlatoani and Tonalsiwatl. Next are the city Rulers; and the Tetekutin, Lords of the Noble Houses. Beneath them live the Nobles, the Pipiltin, who serve the Rulers and Houses and perform the administrative tasks required to run the Empire. Finally, at the very base, are the Commoners, the Masewaltin, the workers who labor in the fields and workshops and elevate those above them.

This structure is sacred. If the base is too wide, the pyramid will not reach high enough, and the gods will not hear our voices or receive our offerings. If the top is too heavy, it will topple over and collapse. Like a pyramid, society needs a base, a middle, and a top.”

—Nekawal (Survivor),
Tlamatini of Xochitlan



TLATOKAY - NOBLES

The noble class is known as the Tlatokay. All Tlatokay are considered superior to all Commoners, but there is an internal hierarchy within the Tlatokay.

TLATOANI - RULER

The Tlatoani is the supreme authority in the territory he or she controls. His word is law. He owns all the land and can claim anything as tribute. The Tlatoani can delegate authority to nobles and lower officials, but ultimately all power in a City-State belongs to him. The Tlatoani acts as a judge to settle important disputes, leads the city's armies, presides over religious ceremonies, and ensures prosperity for his subjects.

Rulership is not necessarily hereditary. Instead, the Tlatokay elect their rulers. They choose the most capable (or at least most popular) among them to become the next Tlatoani. This ensures that the vast power of the Tlatoani always serves their best interests.

Rulership represents both political and divine authority, so the gods must approve each new Tlatoani.

Each city has its own ritual for inducting a new Tlatoani. The most famous one takes place in the capitol, Xochitlan. The candidate journeys to the sacred ruins of Tleteoxiwakan, bows before the sacred fire, and recites a list of his failings that make him unworthy. When he is finished, he leaps through the flame.

If he emerges safely on the other side, it means the gods have judged him worthy. He is then transformed into a divine being capable of speaking with a god's voice and ruling with a god's authority. But if the gods find him unworthy, the flames consume him and transform him into nothingness.

In the entire history of the Empire, no candidate has failed to emerge from the fire. Even still, the Tlatokay are careful about who they send to face the gods, lest others challenge their judgement.

TITLES OF A RULER

Most Rulers use the title "Tlatoani," which means "Speaker," as in the one who speaks for the community. This title confers great respect upon the few who hold it, assuming they possess the legitimacy and power to back it up. Despite our use of the 'he' pronoun, a Tlatoani can be male or female.

In the capital Xochitlan, however, Rulership is split between two individuals: the Wey Tlatoani (Elder Speaker) and the Tonalsiwatl (Sun Lady). The Wey Tlatoani is the Supreme General and Diplomat, master of external matters. He speaks on behalf of the Empire to outsiders. The Tonalsiwatl is the Supreme Lawmaker and Judge, master of internal matters. She possesses absolute power within the Empire.

The prestige of a Tlatoani comes from the influence and prosperity of his territory. Therefore, the Tlatoani of a rich metropolis enjoys greater status than the Tlatoani of a small backwater. But the Wey Tlatoani and Tonalsiwatl of Xochitlan are undisputedly the most powerful Rulers in the Empire.



GLOSSARY OF SOCIAL TERMS

COMMUNITIES

Kalpuli (plural Kalpultin): "Large House," a collection of Masewal Households united by kinship and/or occupation that works the land of a Tekutli and pays him/her tribute. Roughly analogous to Clan or Tribe, though these do not really do the concept justice. The Kalpuli is one of the most important social concepts in Semanawak.

Tekali (plural Tekaltin): "Noble House," a Noble Kalpuli. It is a collection of Tlatokay Households united by bloodline that elects a Tlatoani and rules an City-State.

Altepetl: "Water Mountain," a political and religious unit consisting of a central urban capital and a network of allied towns and villages. Roughly analogous to a City-State or Province.

SOCIAL CLASSES

Tlatokay: Rulers, the Noble class of the Empire.

Masewaltin: Commoners, the working class of the Empire.

Mayekay: Serfs, Masewaltin that are tied to a particular piece of land.

Tlakotin: Slaves.

TLATOKAY [NOBLE] TITLES

Tlatoani: "Speaker," Ruler of a City-State. Roughly analogous to a King or Queen.

Wey Tlatoani: "Elder Speaker," Tlatoani of the capital city of Xochitlan, the Supreme General and External Ruler of the Empire. Roughly analogous to an Emperor or Shogun.

Tonalsiwatl: "Sun Lady," a Ruler of the capital city of Xochitlan, the Supreme Lawmaker, Judge, and Internal Ruler of the Empire. Roughly analogous to an Empress or Vizier.

Tekutli (plural Tetekutin): "Lord," the head of a Tlatokay Household, granted authority over all lands assigned to that Household by the Tlatoani and responsible for governing them. May refer to a male or female leader.

Pili (plural Pipiltin): "Noble Children," a member of a Tlatokay Household, responsible for fulfilling the House's responsibilities as directed by the Tekutli. Most Tlatokay are Pipiltin.





TETEKUTIN LORDS

The Tetekutin, Lords of the Tlatokay Households, are second to the Tlatoani. Although the Tlatoani owns all lands in a territory, he entitles these lands to Tlatokay estates to be administered. The leaders of these estates are known as Tetekutin. They are in charge of distributing lands among the lesser Tlatokay of their estates and ensuring that these lands are managed competently.

Unlike the Tlatoani title, the title of Tekutli may be passed down to descendants, usually to the current Tekutli's eldest son or daughter. However, Tlatokay Households are often rather large, and the Tekutli may appoint anyone in his or her Household to be the successor. This leads to a great deal of intrigue and politics within the Households as relatives compete for the Tekutli title.

The Tlatoani can veto an appointed successor, but this rarely happens. Successors must wield substantial power in order to be appointed in the first place, and will continue to wield that power whether it is recognized or not. In most cases, approval is merely a formality, unless the successor is already an enemy of the Tlatoani.

The majority of a Tekutli's holdings are in the territory to which he or she is pledged, but it is quite common for Tetekutin to also hold titles for distant lands. Sometimes the Empire acquires these lands during war and gives them to the Tekutli as a reward for service. Sometimes they are sold by Tlatokay from other Cities, or traded for favors.

Technically, any such land first becomes property of the Tlatoani, who then cedes it to the Tekutli who earned it. The Tlatoani has the power to revoke such titles at will, but this seldom happens because few wish to anger their Tetekutin in this way. In fact, such deals between Tetekutin of different cities are often encouraged, so long as their loyalty remains with the city to which they are pledged.

Such loyalty is becoming rare, however. As the Empire expands, Tetekutin amass more and more titles, allowing some to hold simultaneous government positions in multiple territories at once. This has given some Tetekutin as much if not more power than the Tlatokay who supposedly rule them!

THE PIPILTIN - CHILDREN OF THE LORDS

Below the Tetekutin are the Pipiltin, the Lesser Tlatokay. The Pipiltin oversee the lands and holdings of their Household as directed by their Tekutli and ensure that it is productive and protected and that the Commoners living there pay their tribute. Regardless of actual kinship, all Pipiltin of Household are considered children who must honor their Tekutli as father or mother.

Pipiltin are usually land owners, but they may also serve as military commanders, priests, architects, bureaucrats, ambassadors, judges, and so on. A single Pili may earn several such positions in multiple cities.

RANK VS. PRESTIGE

Officially, all Tlatokay within a rank are equals. Each Tlatoani is equal to the other Tlatoani, each Tekutli is equal to the other Tekutli, and so on. In reality, some Tlatokay are more prestigious than others.

Prestige is a subtle thing. It is unofficially but universally recognized. It is the visibility and access that gives greater power, opportunity, and respect. In a meeting of equals, the most prestigious speaks first and last, and their words carry more weight. Prestige usually comes from birth, but can also be earned through notable accomplishments or abundant holdings.

The most prestigious Tlatokay are those of strong Tonalteka descent. They are the favored children of the gods and the true inheritors of the Valley. Their cities are also the richest and most powerful in the Empire, and thus they command great respect.

Below them are nobles of Tlalteka descent. Tlalteka gain their nobility through service to the Tonalteka or marriage into a Tonalteka family. They are still powerful, but they defer to the Tonalteka.

Beneath the Tlalteka are nobles of the Alka'balum and the Kalkayawani. Many of these nobles are not part of the Empire, but they are considered prestigious because of their power, ferocity, and ancestry. In fact, some individuals may actually be considered *more* prestigious than a Tlalteka noble (which angers the Tlalteka greatly).

The least prestigious nobles are those of Maiteka and Tzatzini heritage. They are just a step above Commoners, and are usually treated more as servants of higher prestige Tlatokay than leaders themselves.

The Katzawak have no nobles. They are considered to be an entire race of Commoners.

THE MASEWALTIN - COMMONERS

The vast majority of people in the Empire are Masewaltin, or Commoners. Masewaltin serve the Tlatokay. Through their labor, they produce the things that society needs and the Tlatokay demand. Like the Tlatokay, the Masewaltin have an internal hierarchy, which is largely determined by occupation.

FREE MASEWALTIN

The majority of people in the Empire are Free Masewaltin. They are required to work and pay tribute to the Tekutli who owns the land they live on, but they are free to move where they want, marry whomever they please, and learn any occupation they desire. Their lives are full of hard work, but they are free of the tremendous responsibilities of the Tlatokay and the crushing obligations of the lower Masewaltin.



Artisans such as feather workers, goldsmiths, jewelry artists, and flower singer poets are the most prestigious Masewaltin. Their trades are highly specialized and take the longest to master, and their goods fetch the highest prices.

Tradesmen such as carpenters, potters, stoneworkers, and weavers are next. Their trades are essential to everyday life, but they are less specialized and do not command the same prestige as the Artisans. Tradesmen make tools, not art.

Laborers such as farmers, woodcutters, quarry workers, and porters are the least prestigious Masewaltin. They make up the bulk of the population, and for that reason alone they are considered very ordinary. They are certainly not looked down upon, for they perform vital tasks. But they are servants, not masters.

These divisions are not hard and fast. Exceptional people are considered exceptional no matter what their station. Some potters are famous for their skill and considered the equal of any featherworker, for instance. Also, each city has its own attitude about which trades are the most prestigious—Mixiwiliztlan considers skilled farmers to be Artisans, while Popokatetlan regards stone working as the highest profession.

In addition to performing trades, Masewaltin can hold certain civic offices. Masewaltin communities elect their own constables, tribute collectors, organizers, and more. These positions are a means to and a symbol of increased prestige.

MAYEKAY - SERFS

Mayekay are Masewaltin who are not free. They work the land of the Tekutli to whom they owe fealty and cannot leave until they are released. If the land is sold, the Mayekay attached to it go with it. They cannot own anything, but they are allowed to keep a small portion of what they produce to live on.

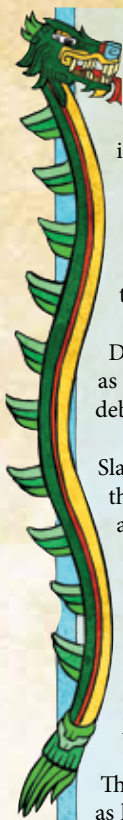
Mayekay are typically landless newcomers who immigrate to the Empire, and their serfdom is usually temporary. An immigrant tribe often spends a generation as Mayekay. If they prove themselves loyal, they become free Masewaltin who are allowed to live and work wherever they choose and allowed to keep a greater portion of what they produce. A Free Masewal pays a set amount of tribute, and keeps the rest. A Mayekay can only keep a set amount and must pay the rest.

Mayekay may serve Tlatokay masters or Free Masewaltin. Artisan communities often acquire Mayekay to work their farmland so that the skilled crafters can spend more time on their art. Tlatokay frequently keep a personal retreat, attended by Mayekay servants.

TLAKOTIN - SLAVES

Tlakotin have even less freedom than Mayekay. They can be owned by anyone who can afford to keep them, and must serve their master without question. They may work in the fields or

the house or anything else that may be required, and they must do this without pay of any kind, although their masters are required to feed and clothe them (those who can't have their Tlakotin set free).



BECOMING A TLAKOTLI

Slavery is almost always a temporary condition. There is no permanent class of slaves in the Empire.

During famines, starving people can sell themselves as Tlakotin to those with food and wealth to spare, usually for a length of time specified in a contract. After their term of servitude ends, they return to their lives.

Debt-stricken people might choose to become Tlakotin as a means of repayment. Once they have worked off their debt, they return to whichever class they were before.

Slavery is the punishment for certain crimes, most notably theft. If you are caught stealing someone's property, you are required to serve as his or her slave until you have paid for your crime.

Finally, captives taken in war are all considered slaves, though depending on the status of the captive they may be regarded with more or less respect. A powerful Kayawani Warrior is treated much better than a poor Maiteka farmer, for instance.

The majority of war captives are offered to the gods as human sacrifices, and so do not remain slaves for long. But captives who are judged unworthy for sacrifice, or those who befriend their captors, may instead live out their lives as Tlakotin.

The relationship between slave owners and slaves is not always bitter. Owners commonly treat prestigious Tlakotin as guests or even children. Most also specify in their wills that their Tlakotin must be freed upon their death.

Regardless of how one becomes a Tlakotli, the status is *not* inherited. Children of Tlakotin are born free. Slavery is personal, not hereditary.

THE CHANGING CLASSES

Warriors, Priests, Nawal Sorcerers, and Merchants are special cases. People who practice these professions exist in the spaces between classes and can travel from one to another, depending on how the individual performs. Whether they come from the Tlatokay or the Masewaltin, they are treated as something more than Masewaltin and something other than Tlatokay.

SOCIAL MOBILITY

Your class is largely determined by your birth. Masewal children are born to Masewal parents, and Tlatokay children are born to Tlatokay parents. However, birth only determines where you *start*. There is a great deal of social mobility in the Empire, whether one likes it or not.





"Like a pyramid, society needs a base, a middle, and a top.

But know this, Eagles and Jaguars: pyramids have stairs. There are stairs in society as well, paths that people may take up towards the sky or down to the ground. The stairs of our pyramids are steep and stern, stained with blood and echoing with the cries of thousands, and they are guarded by fearsome Koatl, who scare away the meek and devour the weak and foolish.

But you may try to climb them if you dare."

--Nekawal ('Survivor'), Tlamatini of Xochitlan

Your actions can raise or lower your social rank, sometimes taking you far away from where you started. It is common to move up or down within the hierarchy of your starting class, but in rare cases, a person might actually change class. The Masewal who accomplishes great deeds will rise, and the Tlatokay who fails to uphold the responsibilities of nobility will fall.

Social mobility has limits, of course. If you are born a Mayekay there is virtually no chance that you will ever become a Tlatoani. But it is always possible to improve your position, and pass that position on to your descendants. This idea of working to increase the prestige of your lineage is very important, and is one of the driving motivations in life.

Marriage is another way to increase your status. Whether you are male or female, marrying into a Tlatokay family greatly elevates your position. Tlatokay pass their power and authority through blood, but the truest, purest source of nobility in the Empire comes from the Tonalteka. It is exceedingly difficult for a non-Tonalteka to marry into a Tonalteka family, for the People of Light guard their bloodlines very carefully. But with dedicated service and skill, it can be done.

COMMUNITY

Societies in Semanawak value community over individuals. People are defined by their communities, and are expected to fulfill their duties within that community, whatever the cost. This is both a traditional value and an unavoidable reality. For instance, a farmer who refuses to work the land deprives his or her entire community of essential labor. If the crop fails because of this, then everybody will starve. Refusing to work is not an individual decision. It affects everybody.

Communities have a say in many seemingly personal decisions, such as marriage, occupation, and living situation. If the community decides that you will not marry the girl or boy you love from the next village over, that is the end of it. You must either abide by the decision, or leave. But in exchange, communities always provide for and protect their members. Your friends and neighbors will always be there when you need them. You also get

a say in everything that happens within your community and an opportunity to convince others of your position.

Communities are layered, built from the bottom up. Smaller communities combine to form larger communities, which in turn combine to form even larger communities. At each level, the smaller community owes responsibility (and tribute) to the larger. An individual is responsible to his or her Household, a Household to its Kalpuli, a Kalpuli to its Altepetl, and an Altepetl to the Empire.

FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD

The most basic social unit is the Household, a group of people living together in the same house. Households can include immediate relatives (parents and children), extended relatives (aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins), and those who are married or adopted into the Household. All members live and work together to fulfill the primary Household tasks: working the land, preparing food, raising children, and providing service to the larger community.

Larger communities consist of multiple Households related by common ancestry. For instance, three siblings might each form their own Household in a village. Each Household functions as an independent unit that has a voice in the larger community, created when someone moves out on his or her own. In return, each is expected to be stable, self-sustaining, and capable of working the lands entrusted to it.

In many ways the traditional Household is a microcosm of the Empire. It is ruled jointly by the Mother and Father, who function much like the Tonalsiwatl and Wey Tlatoani. Mother runs things within the Household, Father deals with matters outside the house, and for the most part, they stay out of each others' way. Both roles are equally respected and equally necessary for the Household to function. There are, however, many exceptions to this traditional arrangement.

The other members of the Household may speak freely, and the heads of the Household may listen to them. But everybody abides by this unspoken code: 'If you live under my roof, you live by my rules!' When the heads of the Household decide something, everybody within the Household is expected to fall into line. Disobedience, whether by children or other adults, is unacceptable.

Households are free to run themselves how they choose, but abuse of any kind is not tolerated. The community swiftly and severely punishes the heads of Households for the mistreatment of children or spouses. They face loss of property and exile from the community at the very least for perpetrating or permitting any such abuses.

Households vary in size depending on the family's wealth and the number of couples living under the same roof. Most Masewaltin Households consist of around ten to twenty people. Tlatokay Households can easily have a hundred or more members.





KALPULI - LARGE HOUSE

Multiple Households are grouped together into larger units known as Kalpultin. This unit is one of the most important in the Empire, and it covers many different roles. A Kalpuli's primary tasks are managing land, creating wealth, paying tribute to the Tlatokay, and mediating disputes between Households. But they also serve a much deeper purpose.

A Kalpuli is similar to a clan or tribe. Its members share common spiritual ancestors; loyalty to their heritage unites them as brothers and sisters. Sometimes kinship is literal and members are actually related by blood, but most of the time their kinship is symbolic—a matter of declared loyalty rather than birth. Symbolic kinship is no less powerful, however. For this reason, marriage within a Kalpuli is usually forbidden.

When you come of age or move into a Kalpuli, you must endure a period of servitude and reduced status during which your dedication and resolve are tested. After proving yourself, you must go to the Kalpuli temple and pledge a Blood Oath to the ancestor-gods who dwell there. This ritual changes your blood to that of the ancestors. Once pledged, you are regarded as full-blooded members of the Kalpuli, with full rights and responsibilities.

In addition to sacred kinship, Kalpultin are also united by profession. In this regard, they are similar to trade guilds. Each

Kalpuli has a signature craft—farming, stone working, weaving, etc—and earns the majority of its income by trading its specialized goods and services. Master crafters teach the trade to descendants and set standards for quality, while other members support them. At the end of the day, everything is divided up among the Households and shared by the entire Kalpuli.

A Kalpuli is both a physical location and a far-reaching loyalty. The temple that houses the ancestor-gods is the Kalpuli's literal “House,” and is usually the center of its population. Home is where the heart is, and the heart of a Kalpuli is in its ancestor temple. However, larger Kalpultin may have members spread across the Empire, separated by space but united by heritage, loyalty, and profession.

As a Kalpuli grows and gains more land, its members spread to new places. If it gets too big, factions might split off, build their own temples, and start a new sacred lineage. Alternatively, distant factions sometimes merge with other Kalpultin. Depending on the circumstances, these arrangements can be amiable or feud-inducing.





FORMING YOUR OWN HOUSEHOLD

In order to form a Household, you must make a formal request to your community and your community must approve it. Being the head of a Household grants rights and status in the community, but it also carries many responsibilities (such as paying your Household's share of the tribute). If your request is denied, you can either stay in your current Household or move to a different community.

Communities are careful about allowing new Households. Their chief concern is whether the new Household will be self-sustaining and stable enough to justify its land. If you can take care of yourself and your family and bring additional wealth to the community, you will be granted your own house. If can't, then it is best that you to stay under someone else's authority. Marriage is almost always a requirement for forming your own Household--there is simply too much work for a single person to do.

It can also depend on the availability of land within the community. If all land is claimed by existing Households, they will each have to give some up for a new Household to form. Sometimes this happens, but it is quite rare, for obvious reasons. More commonly, a community that gains new land will create new Households to work that land. This makes acquiring new land for the community an important goal for many young people looking to start their own Households.

TEKALI - LORD HOUSE

Much like the Masewaltin, Tlatokay are organized into a Kalpuli, a collection of Households united by kinship and profession. These prestigious Kalpultin are known as Tekaltin, or "Lord Houses."

A Tekali is a city's ruling Kalpuli. Most Tekaltin are palaces in the Sacred Precinct at the center of the city where the Tlatokay live and work together in affluent comfort. In large Tonalteka cities, each Tlatokay Household has its own palace, so the Tekali is actually an entire district of the city.

ALTEPETL - CITY-STATE

The Altepetl is the highest level of community (aside from Empire, of course). Multiple Kalpultin join together into an Altepetl for trade, professional specialization, military power, and religious devotion. It is ruled by its noblest, most powerful Kalpultin (its Tekali), whose members serve as the Tlatokay of that Altepetl.

Like the Kalpultin that comprise it, an Altepetl encompasses commercial, political, and religious loyalty. All Altepetls have temples and powerful Priestly Orders that provide (and control) access to the ancient gods of the Sun, the Wind, the Rain, and other great forces of the universe. People gather at the temples to worship, and their prayers strengthen the Altepetl. There are also markets just outside the Sacred Precincts that

house the temples, where worshippers stop to trade.

The term "City-State" is an imperfect translation of Altepetl, for there is more to an Altepetl than its urban center. The word Altepetl literally means "Water Mountain." Imagine a spring at the top of the central temple pyramid. Water flows down as a river to the surrounding settlements, bringing nourishment and joining them all as one large community. In this sense, an Altepetl is almost more like a province, territory, or even a nation; a single unit joined politically, spiritually, and economically.

RURAL SETTLEMENTS - TOWNS AND VILLAGES

Smaller settlements surround the central city and vary in their composition. Some are individual Kalpultin, with their own small country temples. Others are part of a larger Kalpuli whose center is far away. This variance occasionally results in unique tensions in the rural areas, depending on whether people feel loyalty to their town or to their Kalpuli. The character of a town or village can change drastically, depending on whether it is its own Kalpuli (with its own ambitions), or part of a larger Kalpuli, and two towns that technically belong to the same Kalpuli may nonetheless feel strong rivalries towards each other if they find themselves in competition.

Towns are the larger rural settlements. They often collect tribute from the surrounding villages and serve as trading posts or craft houses. They may have richer Households and poorer Households, but they usually do not have local nobility.

Villages are the smallest settlements, typically no more than a few Households. Some villages are inhabited year round, but many are only part-time residences used for seasonal agriculture and seasonal hunting--rather than spending three hours each day walking to and from distant fields, farmers might build some houses near those fields as temporary lodgings for the few weeks they spend on those fields. Those houses then become a village.

Both Towns and Villages pay tribute to an Altepetl. There are a few independent ones, but they seldom remain so for long. If residents wish to trade at a market worship at a temple, or participate in a war, they will soon run afoul of an Altepetl that demands tribute. Refusal means either isolation or conquest.

SACRED ENERGY & GENDER ROLES

Cosmic Dualism is extremely important in Semanawak: day and night, life and death, east and west. Gender--female and male--is one of the most obvious examples of this dualism. The differences between men and women on Earth are just some expressions of this larger, cosmological idea.

Female energy is Creation. It is the ability to build, give birth, and gather. Acts of creation are manifestations of female energy, and women are those who are imbued with it.

Male energy is Destruction. It is the ability to demolish, kill,



and release. Acts of destruction are manifestations of male energy, and men are those who are imbued with it.

These two types of energy permeate the universe and are visible everywhere. Creator deities infused with female energy are goddesses, while destroyer deities who wield destructive male energy are male gods. Balancing these energies is vital to the health of the world and the people in it.

Traditional gender roles in society ultimately stem from these cosmological concepts. Earthly roles are a reflection of larger spiritual ideas. Female energy is beneficial to some tasks, while male energy is beneficial to other tasks. The division of labor reflects this reality.

For example, women are responsible for planting the crops. Their creative energy fortifies the young seeds and infuses them with the potential to grow. Men are in charge of the harvest. Their destructive energy ensures that the nourishment within the harvested food is properly released.

Men may sometimes help with the planting, but it is risky because their energy is harmful to the developing seeds. Likewise, women may harvest, but it is not ideal.

However, gender and its countless interpretations are open questions, not iron-clad traditions. These sacred concepts are subject to active debate in Semanawak by both men and women. People constantly contemplate and consider the roles and symbolism of gender, and over time they evolve and experiment with new ways of exploring them.

EQUAL BUT NOT IDENTICAL

Communities are very structured and expect much of their members. There is a certain amount of work that must get done each day, or everybody starves. It is physically impossible for one person to do it all single-handedly, so there are traditional ways of dividing up these tasks.

Men are responsible for tasks outside of the house. Working the fields, going to war, hunting, and trade are all considered “man’s work.” Certain crafts, most notably stone working, are also traditionally done by men. Stone working consists of selective chipping—destruction—in order to create a useful shape, which male energy is well suited for.

Women are responsible for tasks inside the

house. Preparing the food (no small task, when all the corn must be treated and ground by hand), tending the home garden, watching the children, practicing most crafts, and maintaining the spiritual health of the Household are all considered “woman’s work.”

It is important to understand that the terms “man’s work” and “woman’s work” do not carry any pejorative meaning whatsoever. Woman’s work is just as valued and respected as man’s work, and it gives her equal claim to social status.

These traditional roles also carry over into larger society. Because war is man’s work, most Warriors are men. Because maintaining spiritual health is woman’s work, most Priests are women.



"Rain falls from Sky onto Earth. Clouds rise from Earth into Sky. So too is it with Man and Woman. Each feeds the other, protects the other, rules the other, and serves the other. Each gives the other meaning."

--Momoztli (Altar), Midwife of Tlatlahako

CROSSING GENDER LINES

When considering gender in the Empire, you must distinguish between what is traditional and what is permitted. Many things are traditionally expected of each gender, but few things are absolutely required or absolutely forbidden.

There are no laws forbidding individuals from taking on the roles of another gender. As long as they are able to fulfill the responsibilities involved with their chosen role, women may fight as Warriors, men may serve as Priests, and so on. It is unusual, but it does happen.

Most people do not view these deviations negatively. In fact, individuals who cross gender lines are often regarded with awe and respect because they are thought to possess unique power and insight. The universe is a place of marked duality. Those who blur this duality by merging two opposites into one accomplish something quite extraordinary.

LANGUAGE

Tonaltekan is the official language of the Empire. It is the language of court and official announcements. It is the language of authority and command. It is the most prestigious language, but it is most definitely not the only language.

There are over 30 languages spoken in the Valley, and many more in the surrounding areas. Each city, each Kalpuli, each Town, and even each Village has its own unique language, which is sometimes related to others around it, but often very different.



A VOCABULARY FOR EVERY MOMENT

In most situations, you speak the language or dialect of your Kalpuli. This shows that you are loyal to your people and proud of where you come from. But depending on your audience, your attitude, and what you want to express, you can choose to speak different languages to add additional layers of meaning to the conversation. Your choice of language functions like a form of gesture.

For instance, speaking someone else's language conveys a sense of intimacy or comradeship. Friends from different Kalpultin will speak in their own languages to conduct business. But if one of them notices that the other is troubled, she will switch to her friend's language to express concern and sympathy.

MANY PEOPLE, MANY TONGUES, MANY SOULS

Language is more than just a means of communication—it is a mark of identity. Most people know many languages and can easily converse in any one of them. But the language you choose to speak is a declaration of which community you identify with. You can tell a great deal about where people come from and who they are loyal to based on their language and accent.

It is completely normal to hear multi-lingual conversations in which everyone speaks their own language but easily understands what the others are saying. An average adult knows a *minimum* of ten languages and dialects. If he or she lives in a city, it is more like fifteen or twenty. Particularly well-traveled individuals may speak many more.

This is not due to formal education. It results from simply encountering many languages on a day-to-day basis. Any time you travel or interact with someone from a different city or town, you will hear a different language.

CYCLE OF LIFE IN THE EMPIRE OF THE SUN

The stages of life presented here are more or less "normal." This does not mean that you are required to play normal characters, of course—most characters worth playing deviate from normal in at least some ways. But even if you deviate from the norm—*especially* if you deviate from the norm—you should understand what the norm actually is!

DAWN, THE BATTLE OF BIRTH

Birth is a battle. It is a war waged between the mother and the forces of the Underworld, from which the stuff of new life emerges. The mother is a brave Warrior who fights the forces of death on the battlefield of the birthing bed and endures the hazards and hardships of labor. If she succeeds, she returns from the Underworld with a little captive—her child.

Speaking a different language can also convey authority, defiance, or disdain. For instance, Tonaltekan is the language of authority, and using it imparts a note of officiousness to your words. You would use Tonaltekan (or language of your city's Tekali) to issue orders to subordinates. You might also use it if you wanted to shame someone or establish that you are speaking down to them—scolding a merchant for selling shoddy wares, yelling at someone standing in your way, or gloating over a defeated opponent.

The same words can mean a hundred different things, depending on which language you choose to use.

Childbirth entails all the hazards and glories of war. A woman who bears children is the equal of any Warrior with captives to his name, and a woman who dies during labor goes on to dwell in the House of the Sun alongside the honorable Warriors who perished in battle or on the sacrifice stone.

The other major participant in birth is the Midwife. If birth is a battle and the mother is the Warrior, then the Midwife is the Priestess. She is the one who delivers the mother's little captive into the world. Midwives are often actual Priestesses, but they can also be older, respected women who are skilled in medicine.

Like any other war, birth attracts great interest from gods and spirits. In addition to her medical duties, the Midwife must manage these divine influences. Prior to a birth, she ritually sweeps the room clean to remove impurities and drive away malicious spirits that might harm the vulnerable young life.

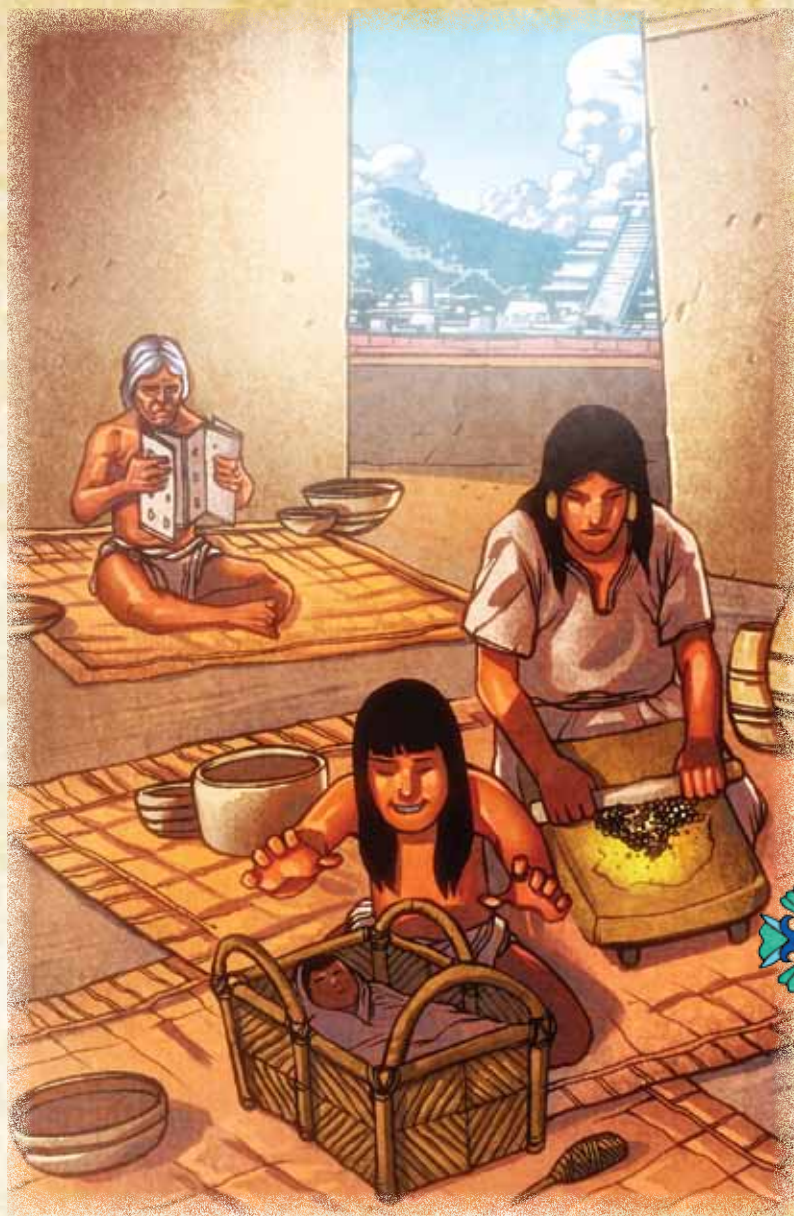
During the birth, the Midwife places a figurine of a Siwateteo, the spirit of a woman who died during childbirth, near the mother's head. These spirits assist the Midwife during the delivery and speak wise, calming words to the mother. However, the moment the child is born, the Midwife must swiftly remove the figurine or the Siwateteo will become jealous and attempt to steal or harm the baby.

As the child breaths its first breath, the Midwife holds and comforts it. She cleans it and severs the umbilical cord while whispering ritual words into the child's ear. Her words are different depending on the child's gender.

If the child is a boy, she says "My very loved and tender son, here is the doctrine that was given to us by the gods: This place where you were born is not your true house. Your own land, your inheritance, and your fortune is the House of the Sun. There you will dwell and rejoice in her service, if, by some happy fortune, you are worthy of dying by the Flowery Death."

If the child is a girl, she says "My beloved maiden, my youngest one, noblewoman, here is the doctrine that was given to us by the gods: This world you now live in is a dark place, a place filled with torment, suffering, hardship, and hunger. But so long as you are here, little Sun, little hearth fire, this darkness shall not enter your house. Stay close to the light and do not wander, precious jade, precious turquoise, for you are the bringer of Day."

The Midwife takes away the umbilical cord. If the child is a boy, she wraps it around a small bundle of arrows. If it is a girl, she runs it through a spinning whorl (a tool used for making thread



"Every dawn is different. Though it follows the cycle of the years, the Sun rises differently every day. Every day it blazes a different path through the sky, similar to the paths taken by all the other days but also unique. So too is it with each person living in the world."

--Nekawal (Survivor), Tlamatini of Xochitlan

and a symbol of femininity). These birth bundles are infused with great power and destiny. Burying the bundle binds the child to a particular place and a particular path.

Parents may give a boy's bundle to a trusted Warrior, a family member or friend, who will take it with him to war and bury it on the battlefield, binding the child forever to the wars of creation and renewal. They may bury a girl's bundle beneath the hearth fire of her house, binding her to her home and community. Families spend a lot of time considering where to place these sacred artifacts.



Finally, the Midwife takes locks of hair from the child and places them in a special jar. These locks of hair are sealed in the jar until the child dies, at which point they are combined with locks of hair from his or her corpse. Families keep the jar of hair in their house alongside those of their ancestors.

A LIFETIME IN AN INSTANT: THE DAY READING

A newborn child is like untempered, unfired clay. It has infinite potential but no definite form. He or she may become a pot, a vase, a spinning whorl, a statue of a god, a brick, or any number of things. But a child without a name is like a piece of clay without shape. A child receives his or her name from the Day Reader during the Naming Ceremony.

Names come from the Tonalpowali, the 260 day sacred naming calendar. It consists of two interlaced day cycles: a thirteen day number cycle (used to determine peoples' compatibility in marriage) and a twenty day Daysign cycle (which determines the person's character and destiny). Each day is a unique combination of a number and a daysign, and contains its own unique fortunes and influences. These fortunes are expressed as symbols in a codex called the Book of Days, which is interpreted by the Day Reader.

The day a child receives his or her Name determines his or her spiritual shape and destiny. For example, a child named on the Serpent daysign acquires the shape, the personality, and the destiny of the Serpent, as interpreted by the Day Reader. Parents can wait to name their child for a few days after birth in order to give it a better fortune, but the longer a child goes without a name, the greater the chance that harmful spirits will enter its empty body and do harm.

The Naming Ceremony adds temper to the child's being and fires its souls, giving it a strong, definite, but unchangeable shape. The ceremony involves the two parents, the child, and a Day Reader. First, the Day Reader reads the child's fate and fortune. Then she gives the parents recommendations for helping their child achieve his or her greatest possible prosperity.

The Day Reading is more than just a prediction about how you will turn out. It is a *guide*, a path that leads to prosperity. Following this path benefits both you and your community. It is the role you were given to play and the place you were intended to occupy. You are not required to follow this path, and indeed many choose not to. But when you stray from your path, you leave a hole in the world and in your life—a hole through which misfortune will surely enter.

MORNING, THE JOY OF CHILDHOOD

Children are cherished in Semanawak. Parents are very attentive to their kids, and the entire community works hard to nurture them. However, love means both kindness as well as commitment to preparing the children for life in the hard and dangerous world. Parents dote on their children and encourage

them to run and play, but they also expect much of them and punish them severely when they fall short. Children in Semanawak work hard and play hard.

Children are considered 'innocent' up until they stop breast-feeding. The first time a child eats maize marks the end of this innocence. By taking in the food of the Earth, they become fully human and indebted to the gods. This is not an occasion for sadness or shame; it simply means that the child is ready to join his or her family and take on the responsibilities of life.

At this point, a child acquires a family name and starts performing chores. Boys gather and carry firewood and help their fathers. Girls help prepare food and assist their mothers. Children learn by example, but their parents also instruct them. Good manners, good hygiene, and hard work are all important virtues, and parents go to great lengths to instill them in their children.

As children enter adolescence, they naturally become rebellious and difficult. A certain amount of spirit is admirable, but serious offenses are dealt with harshly. Lazy children have their hands, backs, and buttocks stabbed with maguey thorns. Defiant children are forced to inhale the smoke of burning chili peppers. These punishments are handed out ruthlessly, but as soon as they are finished the child is lovingly welcomed back to the family.

The entire Kalpuli is involved in raising its children. Friends and neighbors greet children cheerfully and share much with them, teaching them skills and tricks that their parents don't know. Elders in particular spend a great deal of time with children. They look after them, tell them stories, and share their wisdom. In Semanawak, it takes a Kalpuli to raise a child.

SCHOOL

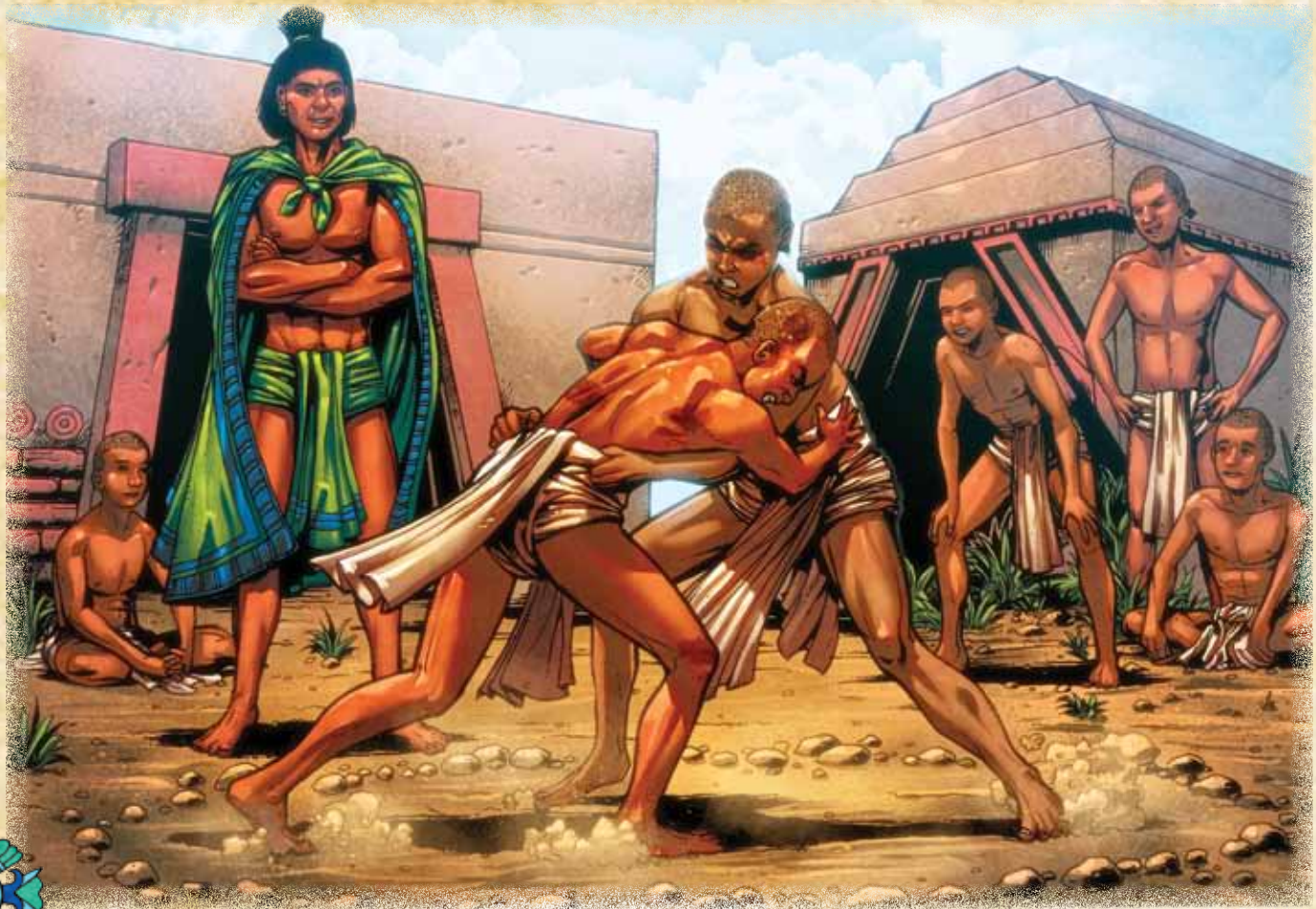
Education is mandatory in the Empire. Everyone, from lowliest Mayekay to highborn Tlatokay, must receive a proper education in order to earn the privileges of adulthood. At age fifteen, you leave your family homes and go to live at school for at least five years. The type of school you attend depends on your status and aptitude.

TELPOCHKALI

Most children attend their Kalpuli's Telpochkali (House of Youth). It functions like a combination of high school, community college, and boot camp. Upon arrival, children's heads are shaved except for a small tail of hair on the back of their necks, which is known as a "baby lock." They cannot grow out their hair until they graduate.

Telpochkali students learn a variety of practical and vocational skills at the Telpochkali. They learn proper farming and practice the signature craft of their Kalpuli. Those who do well may earn an apprenticeship with one of the Master crafters. They





are also taught civic virtue, both through lessons and community service, such as cleaning the streets, digging canals, and repairing buildings.

They also learn how to fight from the Warriors and experienced Soldiers of your Kalpuli. Students who show an aptitude for it may be sponsored by a Warrior and become like a squire to him. As a squire they must carry and maintain their sponsor's things and serve him. In return, he gives them expert training and advice, which helps them become a Warriors themselves.

Girls at the Telpochkali tend to focus more on crafts, while boys tend to focus more on fighting. However, everybody learns at least a little bit of everything. The profession you train for depends on what you are good at and what your day reader, parents, and teachers feel is best for you.

KALMEKAK

A Kalmekak is an elite school attend by a select few. While every Kalpuli has at least one Telpochkali, there is only one Kalmekak in each Altepetl. If Telpochkaltin are like community colleges, the Kalmekak is like a university or seminary.

Tlatokay children (and others who have shown unique aptitude) attend the Kalmekak. They learn a wide variety of lore and skills: Gods, the calendar and Book of Days, how to write

glyphs, proper public speaking and debate techniques, politics and the art of ruling, virtue and philosophy, and mathematics. They also receive military instruction.

Kalmekak students are treated with much more respect than Telpochkali students, and they earn it. They are held to extremely high standards, both academically and morally, and they are immediately kicked out if they do not meet those standards. This illustrate an important idea in Semanawak: Greater privilege always means greater expectations and responsibility.

NOON, THE GLORIOUS TOIL OF ADULTHOOD

Adulthood begins after graduation. Regardless of your occupation, adulthood is defined by hard work. Semanawak is not an easy place to live, it requires great effort from everyone.

Most young adults return home to work in fields and houses alongside other members of their Kalpuli. In exchange for their labor, they are entitled to a portion of what the community produces and granted a say in major community decisions. Once they have the means, they can form their own Households or move to other Kalpultin.

Aspiring Warriors continue to hone their skills. Nobody becomes a Warrior straight out of school. In order to achieve this privileged status, a young man must distinguish himself in war



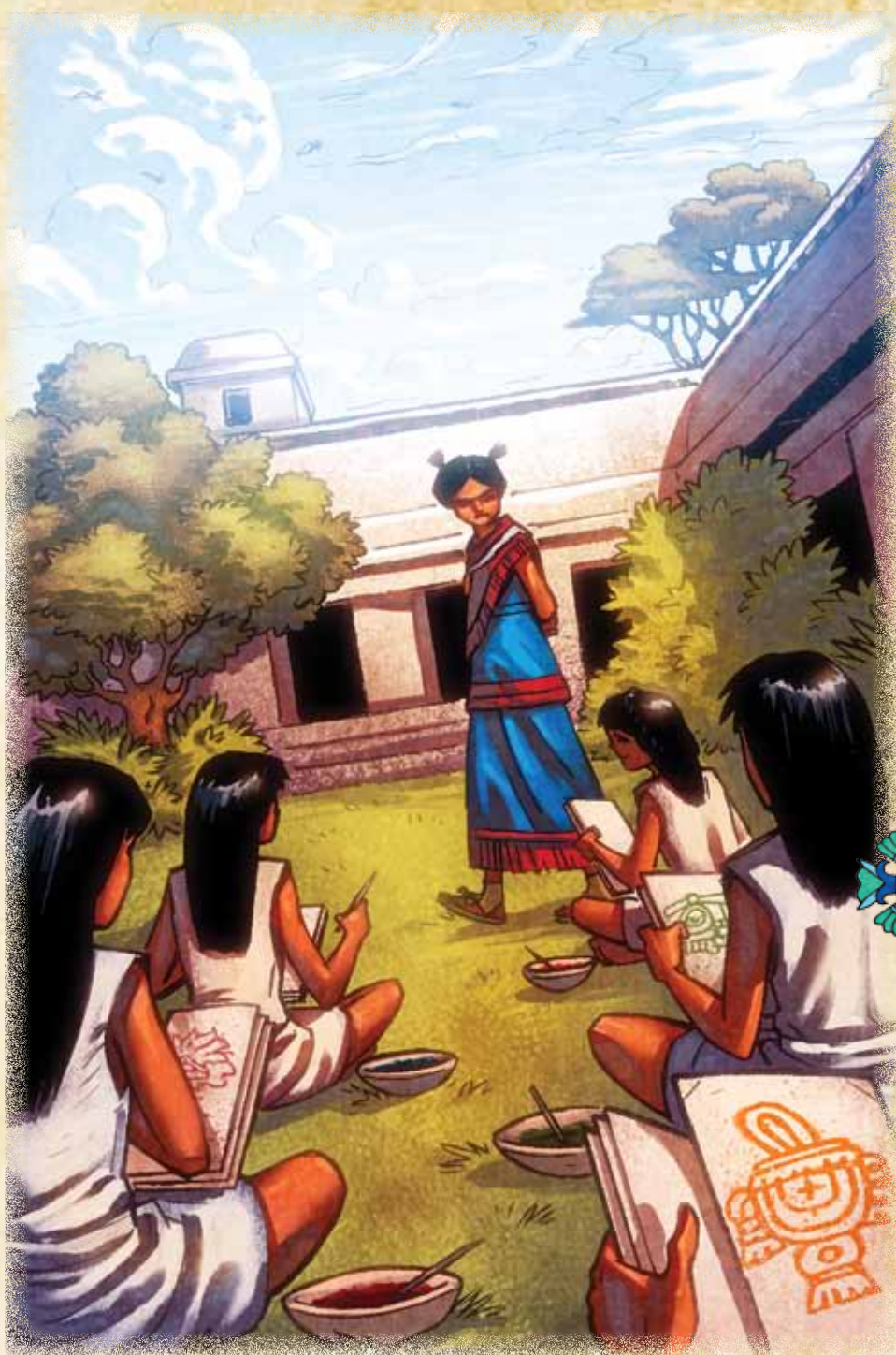
by performing great deeds and taking many captives. He must also gain the attention of a higher ranking Warrior who will act as his sponsor. Once he has proven himself, he can join one of the Warrior Houses, which are elite societies of professional fighters. From that point forward, war is his only duty.

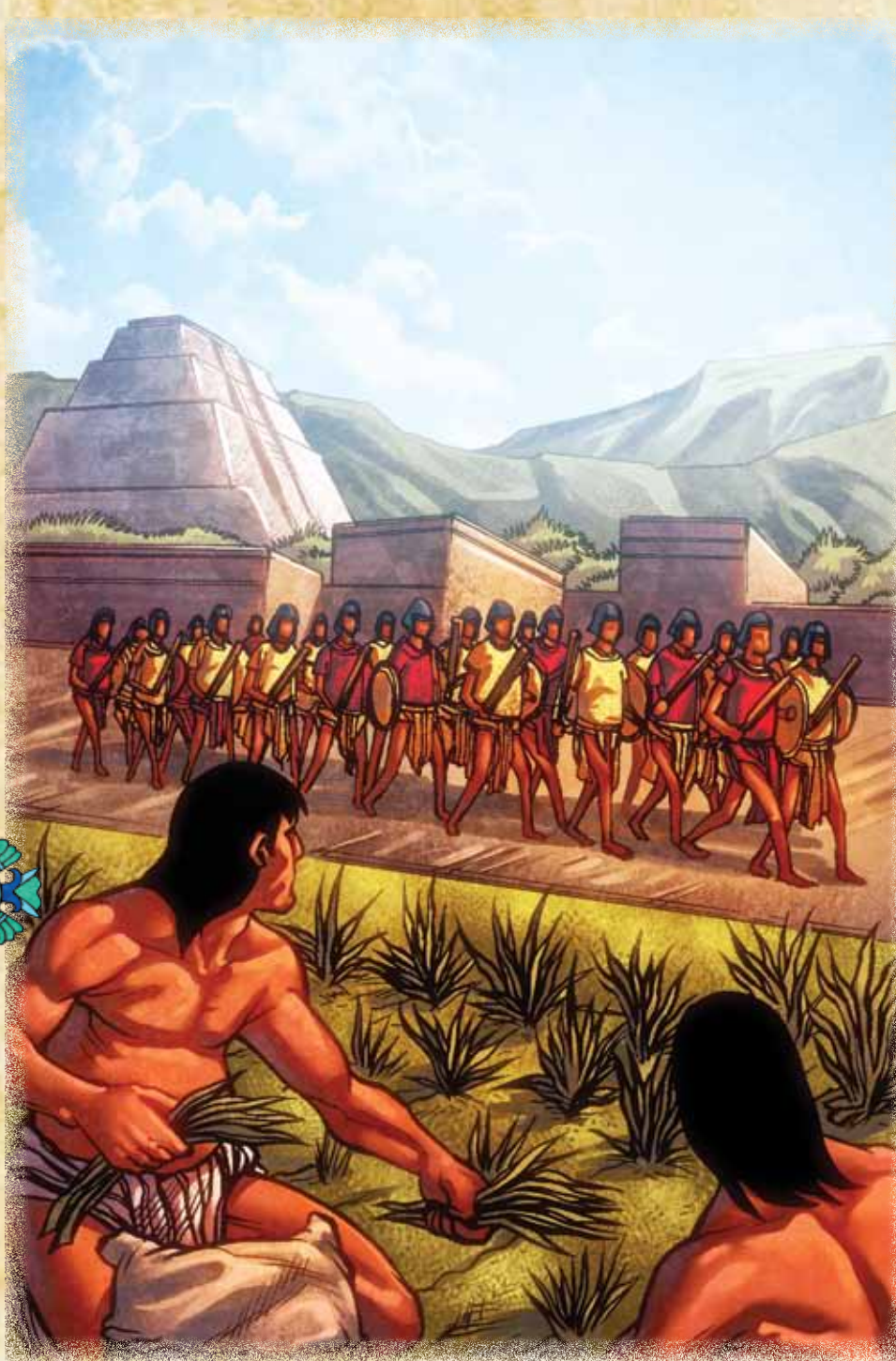
Young Priests must also work to prove themselves. Each Kalpuli maintains a small group of part-time Priests who tend to the local temple, watch for important omens, and deal with the mundane problems and sicknesses of the community. But most aspiring Priests dream of joining one of the great Priestly Orders. Each Altepetl has such an Order, which functions like an elite, sacred Kalpuli unto itself. These Orders require much of those who wish to join—discipline, virtue, wisdom, and a willingness to both die and kill for the good of society. Once a Priest earns membership to an Order, devotion to the gods is her only duty.

Merchants belong to a unique Kalpuli whose signature trade is trade itself. Such Merchants are known as Pochteka. They have no Kalpuli or homeland. They are nomads with homes in a thousand cities, united by their profession and dedication to a sacred way of life. Pochteka leaders meet a few times a year to discuss Kalpuli business and share the profits, but for most of the year each Pochteka “Household” wanders separately and specializes in certain trade goods and trade routes. Joining the Pochteka is not easy, for they guard their routes closely and demand much of their Households. Only the most loyal and dedicated people will gain access to their trade secrets.

Finally, there are the Nawal Sorcerers. They are the exceptions to all normal rules, and so it is difficult to summarize them. These individuals exist on the fringes of society. They are accepted and valued, but always kept at a distance. They are not considered full members of any Kalpuli. Instead, they float between several Kalpultin as partial members. They are allowed to stay for a while and charge fees for their unique services, but they are not entitled to a share of the community’s bounty and they may be driven away by any they offend.

The path of each Nawal Sorcerer is unique and personal. Some attend school, while others grow up in isolation. Some seek advice from others of their profession, while others prefer to learn on their own. But there is no entrance exam to be a Nawal Sorcerer. It is not a profession you learn. Fate gives you the power, and you may do whatever you wish with it. But don’t expect anybody to help you out.





rather than the fleeting, fickle love of youths.

Of course, people still act like people. Lovesick teenagers elope together and run away from home rather than face marriage with someone they don't like. Spouses are sometimes unfaithful. There are just as many dramas inspired by romantic love as there are in any society. But most people recognize that, like the weather, like the stars, and like the gods themselves, such love causes as much pain as it does joy, and recommend a more practical attitude towards life.

People in the Empire do not just randomly meet and decide to get married. Instead, marriages are arranged by a professional Matchmaker, a respected woman who keeps track of all the eligible bachelors and maidens across several Kalpultin and facilitates marriages between compatible people and Households. She is an expert at reading people and negotiating, and also very skilled at divination.

People may marry as early as age fifteen, but most wait until they are at least twenty and have graduated from school. Marriage is a community matter. The entire Kalpuli is involved in the discussion, and the groom and bride have little say in the final decision. Their community expects them to enter the union and do their part to make the marriage work.

When a Household is ready to marry off one of its children, it contacts a Matchmaker. After she finds a good match, the Matchmaker acts

as a go between for the families, taking charge of the negotiations and leading the planning of the ceremony. Tradition dictates that the groom's Household makes the offer, while the bride's family has the privilege of accepting or refusing.

MARRIAGE

Marriage is the glue that holds society together. It unites distant communities, ensures a stable and productive division of labor, and creates another generation of people to support the Sun.

Romantic love is not the basis for marriage in the Empire. Marriage is a component of the community, and the community requires stable, productive Households in order to survive. Spouses are as much coworkers as they are lovers. Society values the slow-burning affection and respect that emerges from marriage,

WEDDINGS

The marriage ceremony is an occasion for great joy. It begins days before the actual wedding. Families consult diviners to determine a fortuitous day to hold the wedding, and make any special preparations the diviner might advise (which gods to involve in the ceremony, which people to invite or not invite, which am-



ulets to wear or medicines to take, and more). After the day is set, the families begin preparing a feast and sending out invitations.

The bride and groom undergo extensive preparations for the event. The bride meets with her mother, aunts, and other female friends and relatives. The older women wash her, groom her, and dress her in beautiful clothes. They dispense gifts, offer reassurance, and give advice about being a good wife to her husband and to the Kalpuli.

The groom holds a bachelor party for his friends, male relatives, and comrades. This strengthens their bond to ensure that the groom does not disappear from their lives after marriage. The older men also give him advice and gifts.

At sunset on the day of the wedding, everyone gathers around the hearth in one of their homes. The mother of the groom presents the bride with a beautiful new Wipili, a traditional tunic for women. The mother of the bride then presents the groom with a new Tilmatli, a cape for men.

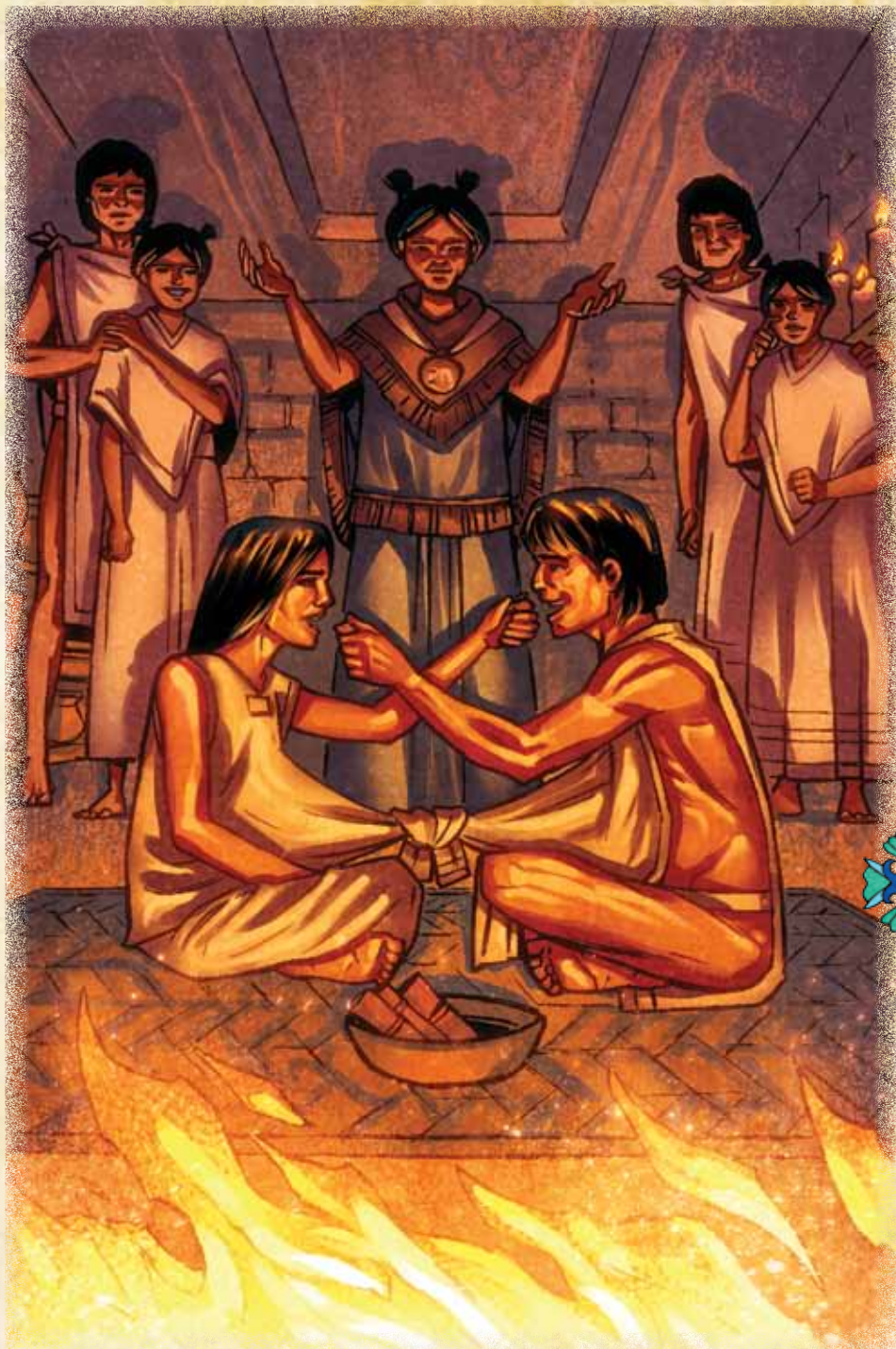
The Matchmaker comes forth and ties the bride's Wipili to the husband's Tilmatli. The two share a small ritual meal of tamales, each feeding the other. Then the Matchmaker escorts the couple to a bedchamber, where they are left alone for four days. They emerge on the fifth day and the families celebrate.

After that, the wedding is complete and the couple begins the process of building a new life together.

POLYGAMY

Polygamy is permitted in the Empire, but is generally restricted to the Tlatokay, who receive enough tribute that they can afford it. The most common arrangement is one man with multiple wives, though the opposite is not unheard of. The first spouse always has seniority and retains power as the male or female head of the Household. First spouses also get a say in whether any others will be added to the Household.

Polygamy is as much an economic decision as a romantic one.



Large Households with additional spouses and children can be extremely productive. It is quite common for second and third wives in Tlatokay Households to be skilled crafters who produce goods for the Household and for trade, which can generate tremendous wealth. Such Households become almost like miniature villages, with their own internal economies and networks of specialists.

Polygamy is politically important as well. Marriages forge alliances between communities, and more marriages equal more alliances. Large households with multiple spouses create great-





AFTERNOON, THE COMFORTABLE DECLINE OF OLD AGE

Semanawak is a land of youth and beauty, a land of flowers and fertility. Elders are valued and respected for their knowledge, but the real power belongs to the young and the vigorous. The ideal life ends dramatically on the sacrifice stone or the birth bed. Anyone who grows old has taken the safer, less glorious route.

Barring accidents or war, people in Semanawak have a pretty long life expectancy. Most people retire at age fifty, although some (particularly Warriors) retire earlier. Retirement is a celebrated event, but it is also bittersweet because it means that one has little chance of achieving more glory in life.

Retirement means an end to one's labor. Elders can take food from the Kalpuli stores without working the fields or fighting in wars. It also means a substantial decrease in authority and influence. Elders turn over Household leadership to someone younger or move in with one of their children. They can still offer advice, and their words are valued for the experience they carry, but all decisions are made by the young and active.

If there is anything that comforts the old folks in Semanawak, it is the children of their Kalpuli. It is customary for children to be named after a grandparent, for names are said to carry a bit of luck and power from those who used them before. Grandparents affectionately refer to their namesakes as their "replacements" and are actively involved in raising them.

The cultures of Semanawak greatly value renewal, and so grandparents find it truly rewarding to see a young life answer to their name. It helps them see themselves in the child and know that, through that child, a piece of them will live on.

DUSK, THE TIME OF DEATH

Of all the milestones people pass, none receive so much attention as death. It is both the terror and salvation of the universe, frightening to face but essential for life to continue. Death takes many forms, and each one opens a different gateway to the beyond.

When the body dies, the Souls of that person are released. Some of these Souls depart immediately—the Ihiyotl leaves with the person's dying breath, while the Tonalli is the light in one's eyes that fades at the moment of death. The Teyolia remains for some time after death occurs—it is the warmth of a person's body that slowly fades as their skin grows cold.

Even after departing these Souls often linger around the body, gathering energy, watching the body, and awaiting a proper funeral.

er stability and interconnectedness across the Empire.

Living in a multi-spouse Household is not without difficulties, of course. Jealousy, resentment, and power struggles are common in such homes. Low-ranking wives may be treated poorly by the others. Husbands may exploit their crafter-wives, or find themselves out-voted and powerless if the wives unite against them. There are more mouths to feed and children to care for. Simply put, the more people living together under the same roof, the more complicated life gets.

DIVORCE

Divorce is not unheard of, though it is rare and causes great scandal. Couples are under great pressure from the Kalpuli to work through their problems and get along. However, blatant infidelity or abuse are grounds for divorce, regardless of which spouse committed the act. Remarriage for either partner is possible, whether they divorced or whether one of them dies. Overall, society is strict but realistic, and uses social disapproval rather than laws to enforce its standards.



FUNERALS

Funerals are very important, for the Souls cannot find proper release without them. Mistreatment or neglect angers the Souls, and may turn them into harmful, malevolent spirits who attack or enter the bodies of the living.

The bodies of heroes are cremated. Their bodies are placed in the fetal position and adorned with trophies and fine clothes and jewels. The fire releases the energy of their body and dismisses their Souls so that they can merge with and renew the universe, while sending their Tonalli blazing into the Underworld like the setting Sun.

The bodies of ordinary people are instead buried to feed Sipaktli, the Earth Caiman. They too are placed in the fetal position, for death is the reverse of birth, and people must return to the Earth in the same way that they arrive. They are buried along with tools and weapons to help them in their long, dark journey through the Underworld. They are also given a few gifts in hopes that they will have a better chance of pleasing Nakoyomiketl, the god of the dead.

In addition to these tools and gifts, the dead are accompanied by a Xoloitzkuintli, a sacred hairless dog that is killed humanely and burned or buried with its master. The Xoloitzkuintli acts as a guide through the Afterlife, leading the way and helping to overcome the challenges and trials ahead. Every Household keeps a Xoloitzkuintli for companionship during life and guidance after death.

NIGHT, THE JOURNEY OF THE AFTERLIFE

There are countless ways to live, but everybody, no matter how they lived, must journey through the Underworld after death.

The journey through the Underworld is difficult and takes four long years to complete. Many do not make it. They fall along the way and fade into darkness. They seek the lowest level, where the Sun passes through each day like a boat back to the world of the living. To reach it, they must pass Nakoyomiketl. If they still carry light within them after their journey, it blinds Nakoyomiketl so they can pass to join with the Sun. If they have gone dark, he devours them, and they are Unborn.

The difficulty of the journey depends on the manner of death. Those who die the Flowery Death, a death of glory and spiritual significance, have the easiest time. They enter the Underworld as glowing beacons, carrying the radiance of their brave deaths within them. This light protects them from the horrors that dwell there, and unless they lose their way, they will pass Nakoyomiketl and go on to dwell in the House of the Sun.

The most famous Flowery Deaths are in battle, on the sacrifice stone, or during childbirth. But there are others: drowning, being struck by lightning, and perishing in fire. The important part is to die bravely and in full bloom rather than waiting for age or frost to wither you away.



Those who die from other means, such as mundane accidents or old age, go down as they are. They have only the light and bravery they gathered in life to sustain them on their journey, and they must contend with the full terror of what lurks below. The pain and difficulty they avoided in life must be faced after death. Very few such individuals make it past Nakoyomiketl. Most are Unborn. Their identities are erased, and their life energy is consumed and returned to the Earth. This is the fate that awaits most travelers.

There is another kind of death. Children who have not yet been weaned are innocents. They have not eaten maize and become indebted to the gods. Instead of going to the Underworld, these dead children go to a land in sky, a lush orchard known as Tamoachan. The trees in Tamoachan bear breasts instead of fruit. Children drink from the fruit-breasts while they wait for another chance to be born.

Many Flower Songs sadly wonder if there is a point to living a life that will ultimately be erased forever. But take heart, travelers! Those who join with the Sun shine down upon their



descendants. So long as the Sun shines, they will live on. And those who join with the Earth supply the energy from which new children are born. So long as there are mothers and fathers and a world to live in, there will be new life.

APPEARANCE AND MANNERS

Everything about you—your upbringing, your social status, your trustworthiness, your very worth—is conveyed through your appearance, your words, your manners, and your reputation. People of the Empire believe that what is outside is a reflection of what is inside, that inner and outer nature are one and the same. If you change one, the other also changes.

People spend a great deal of time maintaining their appearance and practicing good manners and proper speech. Your character and actions are one and the same. You cannot do one thing and claim to be something else. You are as you look, as you act, and as you live.

For example, someone wearing a Warrior's hairstyle tells everyone that he is looking for a fight with the worthiest opponent he can find. Masewaltin respect him, soldiers obey him, and other Warriors seek him out. But he must live up to the responsibilities of his image, for if he presents himself as a Warrior and then refuses to fight, his fellows will treat him as a coward and execute him. People of Semanawk adhere to the rule, "Let him die as he lived." Sincerity is a requirement, not an option.

By allowing people to be who they claim to be, society forces them to live up to the standards they set for themselves. Appearance is a banner, not a mask. If you set high standards and meet them, you earn high status. If you fail to meet them, there is no excuse, because you set them yourself. If you set low standards, people expect you to act in a lowly fashion. Nobody will elevate you until you elevate yourself.

CLEANLINESS AND HYGIENE

The Empire of the Sun is a very clean place. Dirt and grime are physical and spiritual pollutants, offensive to health and the senses. People go to great lengths to keep themselves, their homes, and their communities as clean as possible. Good hygiene is an essential part of your image, and you must take it seriously. Questioning someone's cleanliness is a grave insult, and leaving your own cleanliness open to question is a terrible embarrassment.

Tlatokay bathe several times a day or even continuously, and ordinary people thoroughly wash themselves at least once a day. Soap comes from the fruit of the Kopalxokotl tree. Toothpaste is made from a mixture of roots, salt, and chilies. People chew bits of charcoal to clean their teeth. Depending on your wealth and personal vanity, you can choose among countless beauty regimens and cleaning treatments, from hair conditioners to moisturizers and perfumes.

People take daily steam baths in sauna-like huts known as Temazkaltin. Temazkaltin are places of physical and spiritual renewal, and people of all stations use them frequently. You built a fire against an outside wall of the hut, then crawl inside and throw gourds of water against the hot clay walls. As you sweat, you lightly strike yourself with medicine branches to purify your body from the inside out.

Some occupations inevitably result in dirtiness. Farmers, laborers, and stone crafters get covered in dust and sweat while they work. This is not shameful as long as they clean up before they go out in public or attend social events. Going out unwashed is akin to going out with no clothes.

There are only two reasons to go without a bath: mourning and punishment. People refrain from bathing while they mourn the death of a loved one. Being forbidden from bathing is also common sentence for minor crimes, and the stigma associated with it ensures that perpetrators think twice before misbehaving again.

Blood isn't considered unclean, quite the opposite. It is charged with sacred energy, and anything it touches becomes charged as well. Warriors fresh from battle and Priests fresh from a sacrifice wear blood proudly for thirteen days, after which they reverently wash it away. They spread the wash water across gardens or farm fields to return it to the Earth.

CLOTHING

Clothes are important markers of social status. The type of material you wear indicates your place in society. Masewaltin wear rough, simple, and cheap clothing made from the fibers of the maguey plant. Tlatokay wear clothing made from fine, imported cotton spun by elite weavers. Different colors and patterns correspond to different Kalpultin. Some patterns represent notable accomplishments, much like badges or medals. Other patterns grant magical powers.

MALE GARMENTS

The most basic male garment is the Maxtlatl, a breechcloth made from a narrow strip of cloth. It is looped around the waist and between the legs, and then tied in front with a distinctive knot. There are many styles of knots and accents that can be added to a maxtlatl to indicate status and accomplishment.

Men who work during the heat of the day often go around wearing nothing but a maxtlatl. Young boys under the age of 13 may go without it, running naked or sometimes wearing a small cloak, but for grown men modesty requires at least a maxtlatl.

The other basic male garment is the Tilmatl, a cape-like garment made from a square of cloth that is wrapped around the torso and tied at the right shoulder. Warriors sometimes place the knots at their chests to keep their arms free.

The longer a man's Tilmatl, the greater his status. Masewaltin do not wear them below the knee, and some cities enforce even



shorter requirements. Warriors are permitted to wear them longer to cover up battle scars. Tlatokay may wear ankle-length Tiltmatli, and those who don't move much may wear them even longer.

FEMALE GARMENTS

The most basic female garment is the Kwitl, a calf-length skirt that is wrapped around the hips and secured at the waist with strap. Kwitls come in many styles. They can be long or short and tight or loose depending on whether they are used for work or for show.

The other basic female garment is a tunic-like blouse known as a Wipili, a short-sleeved or sleeveless draped shirt that hangs to mid-thigh. Like the kwitl, there are many cuts and styles, some practical and some highly fashionable.

Many Masewaltin women go topless, wearing only a kwitl. This is particularly common in rural areas, where practical concerns and comfort take precedence over fashion. It is perfectly normal and not at all unusual. But noblewomen and city dwellers always cover their breasts with a wipili.

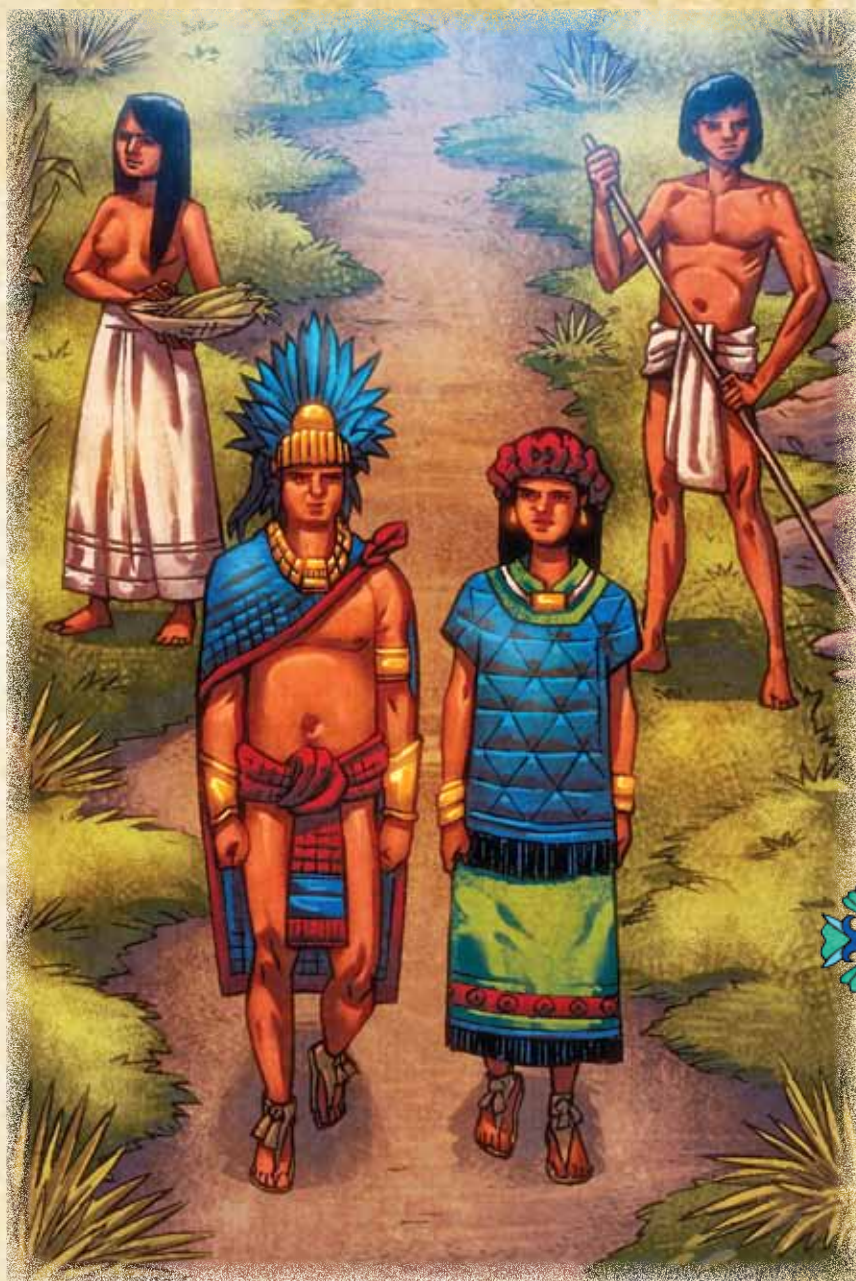
FOOTWEAR

The vast majority of people in the Empire go barefoot. Footwear is a privilege that comes with birth or accomplishment. You can tell a lot about people by looking at their feet. Most Masewaltin have extremely tough, calloused feet that can handle all but the most razor-like edges and points. Callouses, along with soreness, dirt, and ever-present nicks and scratches, are strong indications of Masewaltin status.

The Tlatokay and the privileged classes (Warriors, Priests, and Merchants) wear sandals. Sandals are woven from tough materials like maguey fiber and have soles made from rubber. They are comfortable as well as stylish.

As with many class distinctions, this is much more important in the cities. Many rural Masewaltin wear sandals to protect their feet while working in a quarry, and merchant porters wear sandals while carrying loads on long journeys. However, when such people enter a city or come into contact with superiors, they remove their sandals as a show of humility.

Sandals are a very important point of etiquette. Taking off your sandals is a gesture of humbleness and submission. You can flatter people of equal status if you remove your sandals in their presence. Alternatively, keeping your sandals on in the presence



of a superior is a powerful gesture of defiance. Having your sandals forcibly removed is humbling and humiliating.

Regardless of status, however, everyone, from the lowliest Masewal to the Imperial Rulers of Xochitlan, must go barefoot before the gods in their temples.

HEADDRESSES

Head garments are almost exclusively worn by Tlatokay. Some Masewaltin tie their hair back with simple headbands, but anything more ornate is a mark of prestige and distinction. Head pieces are symbols of authority and command.

Feathered headdresses are among the most beautiful and striking articles of clothing in the Empire. Varieties of feathers are chosen for their unique powers. Eagle feathers impart bravery,





vulture feathers grant intelligence and wisdom, turkey feathers promote health and vigor, and ketzal feathers, the most treasured of all, symbolize nobility itself.

There are several general styles of headdress. The most common variety is the Plume, which resembles a fan made from feathers. These are worn tied into the hair so that they dangle behind the head. Most nobles wear a plume of some sort when they go out in public.

The other major style is broad and crown-like, a row of feathers tied to a strap that is then tied around the head. Feathers may extend off the back of the head, sometimes reaching lengths of 3 feet or more. These are often worn during ceremonies, particularly by dancers.

The most prestigious piece, however, is the Diadem, which may only be worn by a Tlatoani. They are made from gold and turquoise, the most precious materials, and arranged in beautiful patterns by the very best artisans in the land.

JEWELRY

An infinite variety of jewelry abounds throughout the world. People decorate themselves with necklaces and pendants, rings and earrings, and all sorts of bracelets and bands. Nose, lip, eyebrow, tongue piercings are popular and provide even more opportunities for expression.

Jewelry is made from many different materials. Bone and common stone are the cheapest. Obsidian is a step up. Then there are more exotic substances like gold,

silver, copper, turquoise, and jade. Some jewelry is decorated with intricate carvings of gods, animals, and abstract forces that convey special powers.

The most unusual jewelry belongs to the Alka'balum. Their nobles wear carved stone sleeves over the bridges of their noses to change their profiles. A strong, prominent bridge is considered very prestigious, especially when it is made of jade. They also adorn their teeth with permanent inlays of turquoise and other precious stones. Many of these pieces are popular among the nobles of the city of Mixiwiliztlan, who greatly admire the Alka'balum.

SPECIAL GARMENTS

During battle, elite Warriors wear a full body costume known as a Tlawiztli. Tlawiztli are colorful, elaborate, and fearsome, especially when worn along with face paint and banners. These outfits identify them so their men can find and follow them, and their enemies can see who they are. The Tlawiztli also allows them to call upon the full power of their Warrior Houses. The Empire is home to multiple Warrior Houses, each with its own distinctive Tlawiztli.

Priestesses wear a sacred garment known as a Kechkemiltl to signify their station and Priestly Order. The kechkemiltl is a square of cloth with a hole for the head cut in the middle. It is worn draped over the body so its corners hang down in front and in back, giving it a very triangular shape. Each Priestly Order has its own pattern and style of kechkemiltl.

Deity Costumes are the most powerful pieces of clothing. To some extent, all clothing acts as a receptacle of sacred power,

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

While everyone strives to behave with noble manners, there are rigid rules about interactions between social classes. Masewaltin must perform the required gestures of respect, and Tlatokay must perform the required displays of authority. Violation of these rules is considered very rude and can result in dire consequences.

Inferiors must always take care not to outshine their betters. Masewaltin cannot wear cotton or sandals around Tlatokay. Because the social order is based on tribute, the Tlatokay on top should be the richest and wear the finest clothes. There is an unspoken assumption that the best dressed person in a room is the highest ranking.

Occasionally, people of lower rank are actually wealthier than their superiors and can afford finer clothes. For example, Pochtaka Merchants acquire vast amounts of wealth through trade, but they are still ranked beneath the Tlatokay. Many Tonalteka Tetekutin are wealthier than Tlalteka Tlatoani of smaller cities, even though they are technically lower in rank. Some Masewaltin even outshine their Pili masters.

These are very delicate situations, because if you show up dressed better than your superior, it will be considered a challenge to his or her authority, and that rarely turns out well.

If Merchants or Masewaltin upstage a Tlatokay like this, they can expect to be beaten and have their fine clothes torn and sullied by the guards as punishment. They must then walk home, limping and dressed in nothing but dirty rags. Such humiliation quickly chastens underlings and reminds others to mind their place.

When a lower ranking Tlatokay outshines a higher ranking Tlatokay, however, it is actually more embarrassing to the higher ranking Tlatokay. If they order their guards to administer punishment, they acknowledge the imbalance, which increases their embarrassment and risks making an enemy. Ignoring the offense is scarcely better; it undermines their authority and makes them look cowardly.

If the lower ranking Tlatokay is kind and remorseful, he or she will politely withdraw to spare the superior further embarrassment. If he or she does not withdraw and the superior does not react, the defiant underling gains prestige, especially if he or she is meeting with a rival Tlatokay.

For this reason, wardrobe choice is a topic of great concern anytime people get together for feasts, festivals, or court affairs.



but deity costumes completely transform their wearers into living vessels of divine power. To wear a deity's clothing is to become that deity. Those who wear such costumes are known as Ixiptas, or deity impersonators.

Ixiptas are sacrifices who live the life of the god on Earth. They gather energy and adoration until they eventually lose their own identities as they merge completely with the god. At the moment of sacrifice, all distinction between human and god vanishes. Killing the human in the costume releases the god back into the universe, renewed and reinvigorated. The garment is then placed on the god's idol or wrapped up into a Sacred Bundle to be used for magical purposes.

HAIRSTYLES

Hair is a symbol of power, identity, and pride. One of the sacred essences of human life, Tonalli, the essence of light and destiny, resides in hair. One's Tonalli is shaped by his or her hairstyle. Every facet of society, every rank and Kalpuli and profession, has its own corresponding hairstyle. The hairstyle you choose expresses your loyalty and values.

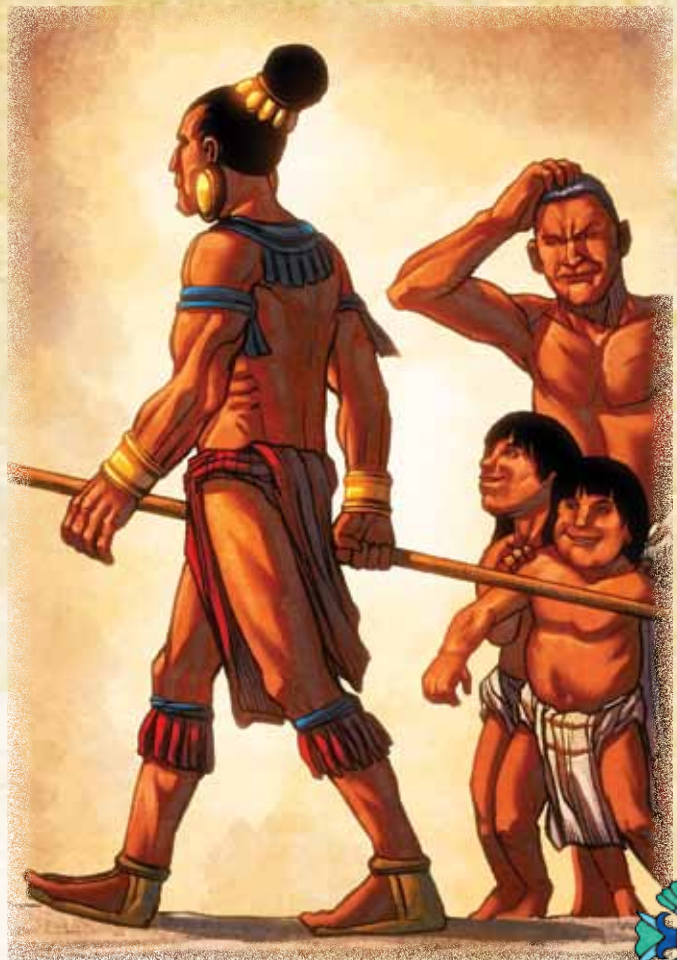
Masewaltin men wear the most basic hairstyle: a short, simple cut with square bangs. This is the hallmark of a farmer or other common laborer, a man without great ambition, a man who has accepted his place in the world. Wearing this hairstyle is nothing to be ashamed of; embracing one's place in the world is one of the highest virtues. But it is certainly not the hairstyle that romantic young men aspire to.

Young boys are shaved bald and kept that way until age ten, at which point they grow a small tuft of hair on the napes of their necks. Throughout school and their teenage years, they keep the "baby's tuft," which marks them as immature boys. They are permitted to shave it off and grow a more distinguished hairstyle after they have gone to battle and helped take a captive.

An older boy with a baby's tuft faces merciless teasing from his peers and from girls. If he is unable to take a captive after five tries, he is shaved bald and must remain that way for the rest of his life. This is an unfortunate fate, because hair is the symbol of pride and glory. Those without hair live without pride or glory, and will never amount to anything.

Once a boy helps take a captive, he can choose his hairstyle. He can grow it into the commoner style described above. Or, if he intends to become a professional Warrior, he can wear a Master of Youth hairstyle. His temples are shaved and the hair on top is combed forward while the hair in back hangs down, giving the appearance of a wide mohawk.

Young girls grow their hair into a simple, shoulder-length style. They can tie it back for practical reasons, but they are not allowed to try more elaborate styles until they are older. Unbound, loose hair is the mark of an unmarried girl or woman. Like an older boy with a baby's tuft, an older girl who still wears a simple hairstyle faces relentless teasing and shaming. She must either



marry or dedicate herself to a specialized profession in order to avoid being called an old maid.

A married woman who dedicates her life to her home wears a housekeeper hairstyle. She divides her long hair into two strands, which she ties or braids and loops around to form two hanging rings over her neck. She arranges it so the ends of the strands poke up from the crown of her head like two little horns. This is also the hairstyle of women who devote themselves to their communities, midwives and matchmakers can wear it even if they are not married.

There are countless other hairstyles. Each Warrior society, Kalpuli, profession, and Priestly Order has its own distinctive hairstyle. Once you become an adult, you earn the right to wear multiple hairstyles: one for your Kalpuli, one for your profession, one to represent your marital or religious affiliation, and so on. The hairstyle you choose communicates the affiliation you most identify with.

The people of Semanawak have very sparse body and facial hair. Many have none at all, and most men cannot grow much more than a wispy mustache and patchy beard. Body and facial hair are considered unattractive, so people generally pluck it to maintain a clean, smooth appearance.





MANNERS

'Dignity' is the chief virtue of the Empire. You must project Dignity in everything you do—the way you dress, the way you move, the way you speak, and the way you eat. Careless words, excessive noise, and frivolity are unseemly and should be avoided, at least in public. Public life requires formality and self-control, and anyone who lacks these virtues will be marked as a barbarian or yokel.

While, in public, you should always adhere to these basic tenets of good manners:

- Speak softly, clearly, and carefully. Do not bray and shout, and do not succumb to gossip or disreputable talk. Do not spread rumors, or rather, do not get caught spreading rumors. (Spreading rumors without getting caught is one of the joys of being a Tlatokay, after all!).
- Walk in a dignified manner at a dignified pace, holding your head high and keeping your arms at your side. Do not run here and there like a flighty fool. Walk with purpose and determination, with excellent posture and poise.
- Eat moderately and quietly. Do not gulp your food or drink or consume excessive amounts.
- Do not engage in excessive sexual activity. Avoid disreputable youths and women who paint themselves and slink around like dogs in heat. Do not waste your sexual energy on unworthy partners, lest you exhaust yourself and become infertile. Save it instead for marriage, where it will serve a noble cause.



Home, on the other hand, is a place of comfort and ease. People laugh, joke, and behave freely when they are at home or in the company of their Kalpultin. Since they live in close contact, friends and neighbors get very comfortable with each other. There is very little privacy, so there are almost no inhibitions among Kalpuli members. At times it can get positively bawdy!

WELL-SPOKEN

The Empire highly values the ability to speak clearly and eloquently. Speaking before an audience is both a virtue and a requirement. Part of being an adult is meeting with your Kalpuli and weighing in on communal decisions.

You are expected to be honest when you speak to your Kalpuli, even if your honesty results in a disagreement. Meetings can get heated, but violence or threats against other members of your Kalpuli are never tolerated. Such actions result in harsh punishment or even expulsion from the community. You must persuade your audience with the truth of your words.

Kalpultin are slow to act. Every action must be deliberated at length, and almost everybody must agree on the final decision. Once a decision is made, all members must honor it no mat-

ter how bitterly they disagree. But most communities will always opt to continue talking rather than rushing to a decision, which can be difficult for the more impatient members.

FOOD AND DRINK

People of Semanawak eat a vast array of foods: beans, squash, tomatoes, avocados, chili peppers, rice, fruit, deer, rabbit, turkey, duck, fish, turtles, insects, algae, salamanders, frogs, and much more. Different areas of the Empire rely on different foods.

But the one food that ties everyone together is Maize.

MAIZE

It is impossible to overstate the importance of maize. It is the most miraculous plant ever known to humanity. Maize is more than just a crop. It is Heritage. It is a living invention of the gods and the ancestors, and a manifestation of the goddess Teosinte (Sacred Maize).

WAYS TO EAT MAIZE

Every meal includes some form of maize. It may be eaten straight from the cob, but this is far less nutritious than other forms. Maize is most widely used to make Nixtamali, the flour that serves as the base for countless foods. It is made from dried maize kernels that are soaked in a lime or wood ash solution to loosen their hulls and unlock their nutrients. These are rinsed and ground into nixtamali flour, which provides greater energy and more vitamins than untreated maize.

Tlaxkaltin (Tortillas) are perhaps the most common staple food. Virtually every meal includes tlaxkaltin. They are made from small balls of nixtamali flattened into pancakes and cooked on a hot griddle. They are used to scoop up beans, rice, and the endless variety of sauces and moles that people eat.

Tamalis are another common food, particular for travelers. Nixtamali is packed around a filling, wrapped in maize leaves, and then steamed in a pot to create a compact, delicious meal. Anything may be used as tamali filling: turkey, beans, fish, and even fruit.

Maize is included in sauces and moles. It is even added to drinks. People commonly eat gruel made from Nixtamali and water. Popcorn is also a popular snack.

OTHER FOODS

Many other foods supplement maize. Beans and squash are prevalent because they grow well next to maize. Farmers plant them side by side in the same fields, providing a balanced diet while also maintaining proper nutrient levels in the field soil.

Chili peppers, tomatoes, and avocados are also widely used, either together or separately. They are delicious on their own, but they can also form the base for a nearly infinite variety of sauces and moles. Many fruits are also used for this purpose—





papayas, tomatillos, and many others.

The most common meat is turkey. Turkeys have been domesticated and are raised in a manner similar to chickens today. Deer is also widely available, though one must venture into the less populated forest regions to reliably find them these days. Fish, shrimp, and other aquatic creatures from the Lake and rivers provide a nice alternative to turf meats. The water also attracts large numbers of ducks and other waterfowl, which are hunted for both their meat and feathers.

DRINKS

People of all classes enjoy juice, especially on market day when traders bring fresh fruit from the country.

Atoli is a thick, shake-like drink made of Nixtamali mixed with water and spices. Farmers and laborers drink Atoli because it delivers a great deal of nutrition and energy in a very efficient package. They carry pre-mixed batches to work and drink it during breaks.

Chocolate is the drink of choice for the Tlatokay. It is served as a warm, frothy mix of nixtamali, vanilla, cinnamon, chili peppers, and ground cocoa beans. Cocoa beans do not grow in the Valley, so they are imported from the lowland jungles to the south. They are so valuable and rare that the markets use them as currency. Therefore, drinking chocolate is a sign of abundant wealth—almost like lighting a cigar with a \$100 bill!



“Long ago, the rain goddess Elopatiliztli coupled with Teoxotlani the Sun Prince and gave birth to a daughter named Teosinte. Teosinte was curious and bright, and she wandered the world alongside her rain-giving mother. She learned the mountains, marshes, hills, plains, and all the lands that have ever seen rain. Wherever her mother went, little Teosinte followed, causing plants to grow so the animals would have food to eat.

One day she passed over the heads of our ancestors and saw that they were starving. They could not eat the grass, so they hunted deer. They could not eat the leaves, so they hunted rabbits. But all the deer and rabbits had all run away or been eaten, and the people had nothing left. Their tears of hunger mingled with the rain.

Teosinte was sad to see our ancestors suffer, so she came down with the rain during a storm to give them a plant they could eat. Xolokwani the jealous Moon God saw her generosity and sent his vulture spirit to attack her. This cause Teosinte to fall from the sky and tumble down the steep slopes of (some southern) Mountain, which dashed her into a thousand pieces. The pieces sank into the Earth and grew into the wild maize we call Teosinte.

Our ancestors found Teosinte’s sprouting body, and each saw something different. People from the mountains saw maize that would grow well in dry, rocky soil. People from the marshes saw maize that would grow in wet, muddy soil. Wom-

en saw maize that would be good for cooking, and men saw maize with stalks that could be made into shields for war. Each developed their own maize out of Teosinte. Each consumed the seeds of her body and grew full and healthy.

Teosinte’s gift gives us the infinite varieties of maize we use today. Her knowledge of all the lands of the world gives us a form of maize for each land and each purpose. We nourish ourselves from her body in a thousand ways. By eating her corn flesh, we become one with her and one with each other. We may be many people, many families, many souls. But we are all one with Teosinte, and therefore we are all brothers and sisters through Maize.

We plant Teosinte, wild maize, alongside our domesticated fields as a tribute to her gift and sacrifice. Her wisdom guides our seed lines, keeping them in tune with the land while bringing news of other lands.

It is said that Elopatiliztli still mourns her fallen daughter. That is why the tears of the sky make Teosinte come to life again. The goddess of rain watches us closely to ensure that we care for her daughter. So long as we respect maize, she will come to our lands to mourn, bringing her rainy tears. But if we are negligent or abusive, her tears will turn to anger, and we will wither in drought or drown in floods.”

--Kozamalotl (Rainbow), Corn Priestess of Mixiwilzltlan



OKTLI, THE DRUNKEN RABBIT DRINK

Oktli is a sacred drink. It is a thick, nutritious alcoholic beverage made from the fermented nectar of the maguey plant. Oktli is universally beloved as a bringer of joy and healing.

The intoxicating effects of Oktli mark it as a powerful spiritual substance, a way of opening one's self and drawing closer to powerful beings that dwell just out of sight. Drinking Oktli can be extremely enjoyable and even healthy, but it is important to realize that it carries risks and responsibilities as well. Drunkenness attracts harmful spirits as well as benevolent ones.

Cities have strict laws about alcohol consumption. People are free to drink Oktli at home as long as they exercise good judgment. People who drink in public face severe punishments, especially if they are wild and disorderly. A Masewal who drinks in public will have his or her house destroyed, and a Tlatokay will be beheaded.

TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY

Strictly speaking, the Empire is in the midst of a Stone Age because stone is the chief tool-making material. However, this is highly misleading and does not do it justice. "Stone Age" implies something crude and primitive, and there is nothing crude or primitive about the way the people of the Empire live.

Also, stone is not really the chief tool-making material.

Crafters make many wonderful things out of stone. They are skilled and clever, and they embrace the unique qualities of their materials. They are unquestioned masters of their trade. But it is not mastery of stone that makes the Empire great. It is mastery of life itself. Living things are the keenest tools in the Empire.

KNOWLEDGE VS. TECHNOLOGY

Much of the technology the Empire possesses would be better described as lore or knowledge. It is a way of doing things, rather than a permanent piece of construction. It is a way of interacting with the landscape.

Take, for instance, the composition of farm fields. Farmers all over Semanawk grow several different plants on the same plot of land at the same time. One of the most important plant combinations is maize, beans, and squash. Squash covers the ground to combat weeds and hold moisture in the soil. Maize stalks push up through the squash and form tall poles, which the bean sprouts then crawl up. The beans then restore vital nutrients to the soil that the maize and squash use up. Each plant provides nutrients or structures that the others need, and when eaten together these three plants form a nutritionally complete meal.



There is no obvious tool or machine involved in this process. It is just three crops, planted in a specific order and in a specific arrangement. Yet doing it this way saves a tremendous amount of labor and land. The plants pretty much take care of themselves, and provide everything you need to survive in one convenient place. The "technology" lies in understanding how the plants work, and using that knowledge to set things up so that they naturally do what you want them to do.

This principle extends far beyond individual farm plots. Large sections of the landscape were gradually sculpted over time by the ancestors using these sorts of techniques. Nobody knows for sure just how extensive their influence was, but some believe that the reason the Valley is so lush and full of useful plants is because the ancestors gradually sculpted it to be so. The true legacy of those who came before is not the ruins they left, but the ecosystem they created that continues to this day.

THE LIFESPAN OF TOOLS

Tools in the Empire are not made of metal. They are extremely useful, but they are made of stone, wood, bone, fiber, and hide, and none of these things last. They become broken, frayed, and worn out, aging much like people age. People are born, people age, and people die. This cycle echoes throughout the universe, reflected in the day, the years, the rise and fall of nations, and everywhere. It is also true in the case of tools.

Tools and weapons have their own life cycles. They are made in large groups leading up to the time they are needed, they are used happily and vigorously, and then, when the job is done, they are brought back and ceremonially destroyed together. This releases their sacred energy and ensures that everyone will be using new, fresh tools and weapons the following year.

For this reason, people of the Empire do not generally get too attached to things. There are some things that are long lasting and enduring, such as one's house, the mountains, and the cycle of the days. But most things are fleeting, and if you wish to survive you must adapt to this.

BUILDINGS & ARCHITECTURE

"The sky is an ocean, a great sea above us. Travel far enough East or West and you will reach the place where the sky and the ocean meet and wrap around. Reach high enough upwards, and you will find water.

That is why rivers flow down from the mountains. They are high enough that they touch the sea above. They dip their gourds into the heavenly ocean and drink from its depths, and this divine essence flows down as rivers.

If we wish to drink from the heavenly waters, we must build our own mountains. We must reach high with our gourds. And when rivers flow down the slopes of our mountain-pyramids, we will know that we have learned the lessons of the landscape, the earthly codices left by the gods to teach us."

—Tekpatletzin (Flint Fire), Smoking Priest of Popokatetlan



KANAN K'AX

The Alka'balum are the greatest masters of landscape management and life sculpting. Their jungles are living masterpieces, and they control them with a degree of skill that most consider magic.

To most outsiders, one section of jungle is pretty much the same as another. It all looks like wild, untamed foliage. But the Alka'balum recognize two types of jungle: K'ax (Forest) and Kanan K'ax (Well-managed Forest).

K'ax jungle is wild. The plants that grow there were not selected by any humans, and the spirits who live there are strangers. K'ax jungles change and roil like the ocean. They flow with their own currents and swell with their own living waves. They are what give the Southern Jungle its deadly and trackless reputation.

MASEWAL HOUSES

People of Semanawak spend most of their time outside, especially the Masewaltin. Farmers and laborers spend all day in the fields or quarries, and crafters work outside to avoid littering their sleeping and eating spaces with chipped stone or bits of clay. People only go indoors to sleep, eat, pray, and seek shelter from inclement weather.

A single house is usually comprised of several buildings. The number of buildings depends on its size and the owners' wealth. Small, poor families live in two-building houses, with both buildings serving multiple functions. Large, prosperous families can afford to build more specialized structures.

Each House may have a stone kitchen building, one or more sleeping huts (depending on how many couples share the house), a Temazkali steam bath, a laundry hut, and a latrine. (Neighborhoods in urban areas share a public latrine.) Houses commonly include additional storage buildings for household goods, supplies, and crafting materials as well. All houses have a small shrine to the Household's revered gods and ancestors.

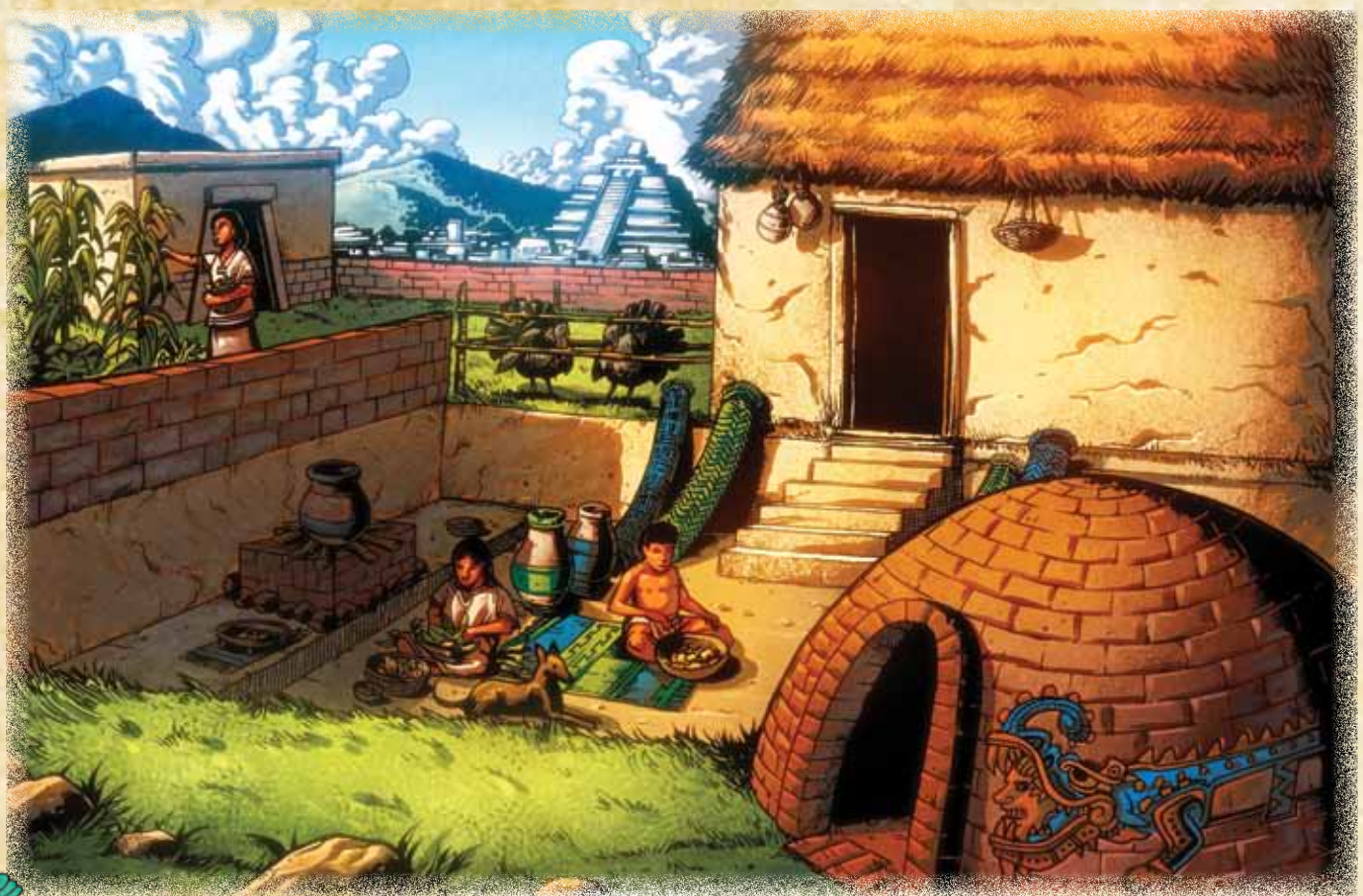
These buildings are located on a square platform, which groups them together as a single house with a single shared foundation. Buildings are arranged around the edges of the platform to create a courtyard in the middle. Residents spend most of their time in the courtyard, it is the "living room" of the house.

The buildings themselves are simple but solid. They have walls made of wood or adobe and thatched or slate roofs. They don't have windows; if you want light and air, you simply go outside. Doorways stand open with only a curtain or blanket for privacy. Security not a concern because people live in tight-knit neighborhoods surrounded by friends and family.

Interiors are very spare, without much in the way of furniture. People sit and sleep on reed mats. Sometimes they use low tables for eating, but more often they simply eat out of pots

Kanan K'ax jungle is much different. The plants that grow there have been woven together by human guides. They support and embrace each other, and provide a wealth of useful materials to the humans who created them. The spirits that live there are on good terms with the farmers, and are quick to answer any calls for help. Kanan K'ax forests are the ships upon which the Alka'balum sail through the Jungle.

All Alka'balum cities are surrounded by zones of Kanan K'ax that the local Jaguar King can control. Such jungle is an extension of the community, as much a part of society as the houses and the people. It provides food and materials just like a laborer would. It watches after the children just like a fellow Kalpuli member. And when called upon, it will go to war on behalf of its community...



with legs built on the bottom. Tools and decorations are hung on the walls to keep the floor bare so that it can be frequently swept clean.

TLATOKAY HOUSES

Tlatokay houses are similar to Masewaltin houses, but they are much bigger and grander. They too consist of several structures built around a central courtyard on a shared foundation, but their central courtyards may be immense. The structures themselves are bigger and are often built flush with each other to form a continuous wall around the courtyard for greater privacy.

Tlatokay houses are divided up much like Masewaltin houses, but Tlatokay can afford to create many large specialized structures. Kitchens are vast cooking houses large enough for twenty cooks to work simultaneously. Temazkali are two-story buildings with live-in staff and enough room for twenty people. There are rooms to house large numbers of workers, rooms to display fine goods and art, and often a full household temple. The wealthiest Tlatokay have vast mansions with gardens, fountains, and zoos stocked with exotic birds and creatures from all over the world.

Most buildings are single-story. A few have two stories, but most cities forbid houses from being any taller. Greater heights are reserved for palaces and temples.

It is not uncommon for a Tlatokay to have multiple houses. Tonalteka in particular often hold estates across the Empire,

and may have many homes in many cities and towns. Some also like to build country estates for themselves far outside the Cities as a sort of retreat.

PALACES

Second only to Temples, Palaces are enormous and incredibly beautiful structures built by the Tlatoani. They are several stories tall and have hundreds of rooms. They serve as the seat of government, housing the Tlatoani, his or her family and riches, and the administrative offices of the city, as well as providing lodgings for visiting diplomats and other important guests, holding over 1,000 people at a time.

Each palace is unique. Some are low and sprawling with intricate walkways and arches and inner courtyards full of beautiful plants and animals. Others resemble pyramids with doors, windows, passages, and terraces on each level. They have intricate designs and statues around the building, beautiful paint across both inside and outside, or walls and columns made of marble, an extremely rare and expensive material in Semanawak.

Most cities have one Palace, which is home to the Tlatoani and the rest of the government. The Tlatokay live around the Palace, either in separate houses in or in dedicated wings of the Palace. Bigger cities, like Xochitlan or Mixiwilztlan, have multiple palaces dedicated to different functions of government.

PYRAMIDS

The very largest structures in any City are its Pyramids, located in the Sacred Precinct in the very center and home to the gods the city venerates the most. They tower over the City and the surrounding land, demanding admiration and obedience from all who dwell within their shadows.

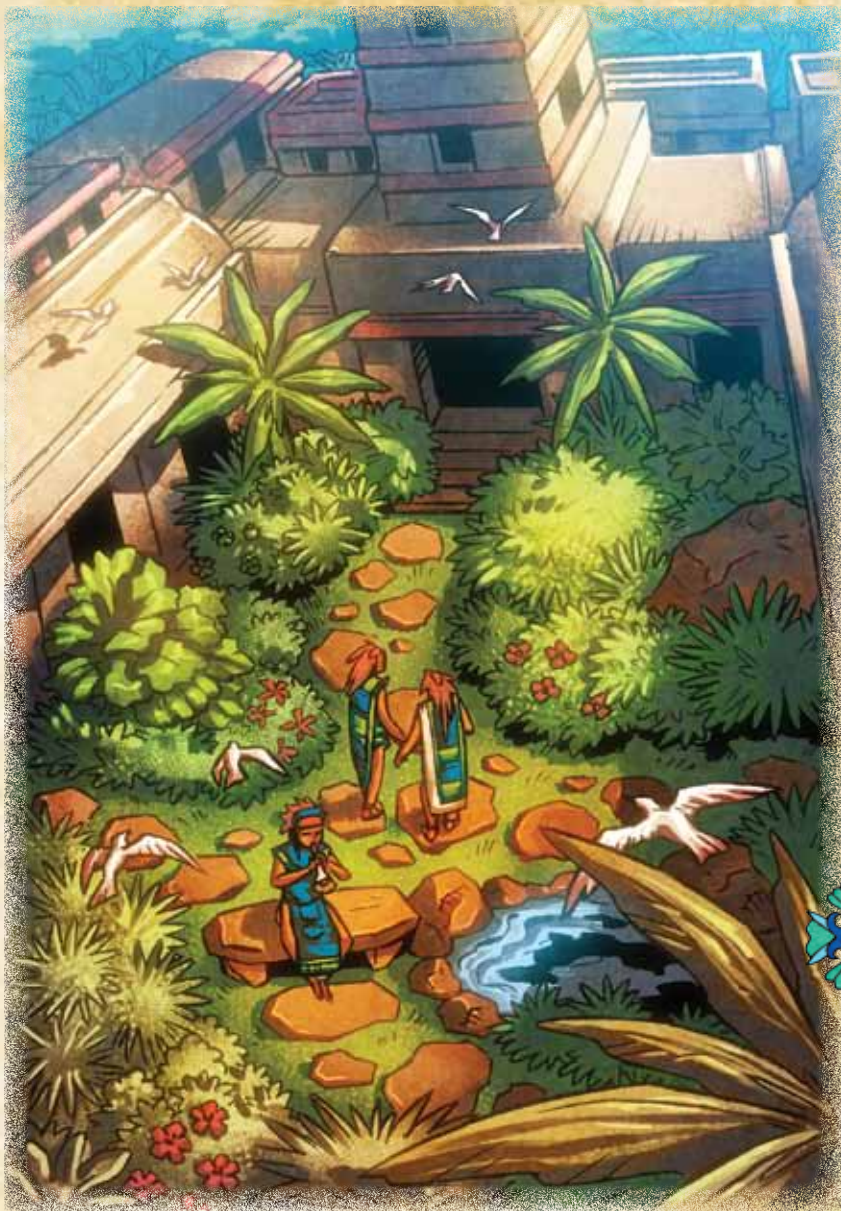
Pyramids are sacred mountains built in tribute to the natural mountains of Semanawak. Their purpose is to reach into the sky and raise those at the top high enough to speak to the gods and deliver offerings. They are connections between Earth and the Beyond, literal stairways to heaven.

Tombs, tunnels, sacred springs, and the remnants of earlier versions of the pyramids all lie hidden beneath the impressive exteriors, representing the caves and worlds that exist beneath the mountains. This connection to both Sky and Underworld is what makes mountains, and the pyramids built to honor them, so sacred. They are the embodiment of the vertical axis, a human made conduit through the universe.

No pyramid is built all at once. In addition to spanning the different levels of the universe, pyramids also stretch through time. They start as small, elevated platforms with perhaps a single step, and the city gradually adds onto them. Rather than demolishing the old structure, the additions are built over the old one, incorporating it. Old pyramids are like onions with many nested layers.

A passage at the top provides access to this strange labyrinth within. Ancient lore and secrets are kept there and guarded by powerful spirits and ancestors. This is also where the rulers are entombed. Their bodies are wrapped in layers of fine cloth, along with sacred stones, jewels and relics. These royal mummies are deposited in chambers within the pyramid along with vast riches and often the bodies of servants and spouses.

These regions are places of tremendous sacredness, and only the Priests and very select others are permitted access. However, they are also regions of great danger. The beings that dwell there are not always peaceful, and even the Priests fear to venture into the very deepest regions. The pyramids of the Empire were built over the old pyramids of the Kakayawani, after all, and not everything rests peacefully in the foundations of the sacred mountains.



TEMPLES

While an entire pyramid could be thought of as a sort of temple, the actual Temple building is a single-room house located on the top of the pyramid. Temples are dark, smoky, and mysterious. They smell of incense, flowers, and blood from the many offerings the Priests give each day. The god's idol is usually located at the back, veiled from direct view by gauzy curtains, while prayer bundles containing holy relics line the walls.

Temples are both moving and terrifying, like the home of an avalanche or a hurricane. They are places of veneration and also safehouses to store dangerous material far away from others. The idols and artifacts stored there are direct connections to the gods and must be closely guarded, both to protect them from harm and to prevent them from causing harm to others.

Worship in Semanawak is a mixture of reverence and fear, for the gods are immensely powerful, and while they can all be benevolent they are also fickle and easily offended.



MARKETS

One of the most important and popular areas of a City is its Market. Markets in Semanawak are huge central plazas where Merchants and people from the outlying towns gather to trade. A City's army makes it powerful, and its temples make it prestigious. But its Market truly draws people together.

Markets appeal to every sense. Brilliant colors abound, painted pots, patterned cloth, shimmering feathers, mouth-watering produce, and the latest fashions from across the Empire. Smells fill the air, fresh tortillas, roasting turkeys, cloying incense, and the ever-present flowers. A busy, thrilling din envelopes the Market at all times, the calls of sellers advertising their wares, laughter, arguments, hundreds of languages, and energetic songs.

The plaza is divided into a number of lots where sellers spread blankets and display their goods. The patterns on the blankets announce the town or Kalpuli from which they come.

The professional Pochteka merchants set up colorful tents that provide shade and a little privacy. Their colors hint at the origin of wares within: red signifies the Desert, blue signifies the Jungle to the south, and white signifies the Eastern Crescent.

Though every City's Market has an impressive selection of mer-

chandise, each one is known for one thing in particular. Ilwika-kalko's Market is known for musical instruments that are lovingly crafted by the finest flute and drum makers. Popokatetlan's is known for its stone crafts. Tlatlahako's features a dizzying array of medicines, good luck charms, and mystical aids. Teoyezteko is the place to find turquoise and other Desert gems. Mixiwiliztlan is known for its selection of slaves.

The most awe-inspiring Market is located in Xochitlan. Situated at the very center of the Valley and the Empire, it is the ultimate destination for every imaginable trade good. It is said that if something exists in the world, it can be found in the Market of Xochitlan.

Unlike most places, the Market of Xochitlan is open daily. It serves 10,000 to 20,000 people on normal days. On Market Day, attendance swells to 50,000 or 60,000 people. Merchants have counted as many as 100,000 people on particularly huge shopping days!

Goods arrive by foot and by boat. Bridges from shore conveniently lead into the Market, allowing trains of porters to march into town and deliver goods. Broad canals connect the Market to the entire Lake, allowing boats to row to the edge of plaza and unload. Hundreds of Market officials and constables are dedicated to managing the large volume of traffic.





MARKET DAY

Weeks in *Semanawak* are five days long. The first four days are dedicated to work and service, and the fifth is Market Day. On this day, people from all over come streaming into the cities to sell and shop.

Market Day is more than just a time for trade. It is also a time to socialize. Countless friendships have started from chance meetings at the Market and are maintained through weekly meetings and chats. “Market Neighbors”—people who live far apart but enjoy setting up their stalls near each other on Market Day—is an important relationship, a chance to learn about the wider world, vent local frustrations, and make arrangements for travel.

Market Day is also an occasion for fun and entertainment. The crowds attract musicians, dancers, storytellers, acrobats, and all manner of entertainers. Many come to watch these amazing spectacles. People play games and competitive sports such as *Patolli*, wrestling, *Ullamalitztli*. Some games are honest and some are shady, but all are great fun and invariably well-attended.

Market Day is the culmination of the week, the goal you spend the other four days working towards. It is, quite simply, what everybody does on the fifth day. It takes something truly important and pressing to keep a person from attending, and an unexplained absence will draw concerned questions.

MONEY

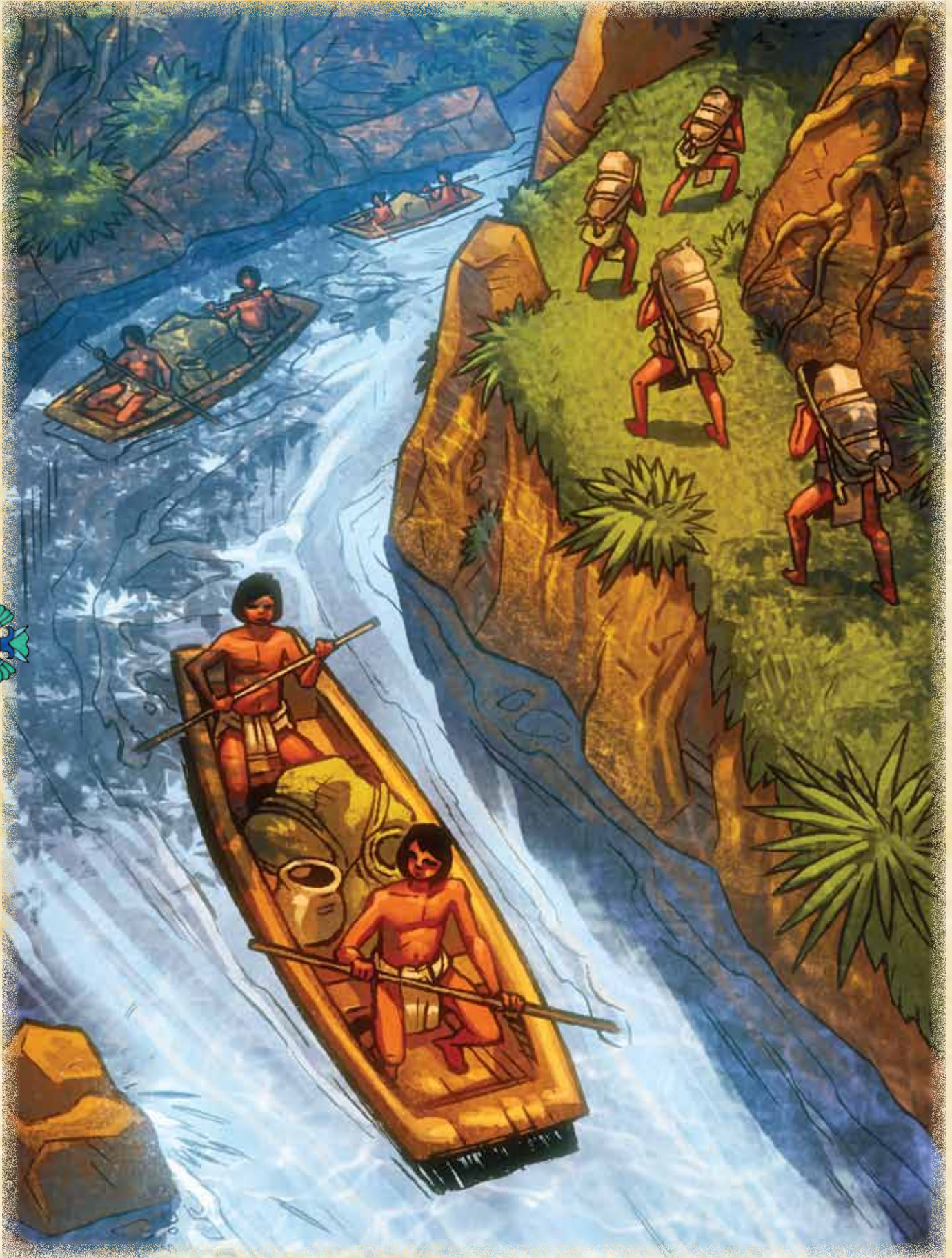
Barter is the most common way to trade. You can barter with almost anything: food, cloth, knives, turkeys, pots, shells, feathers, raw stone, and more.

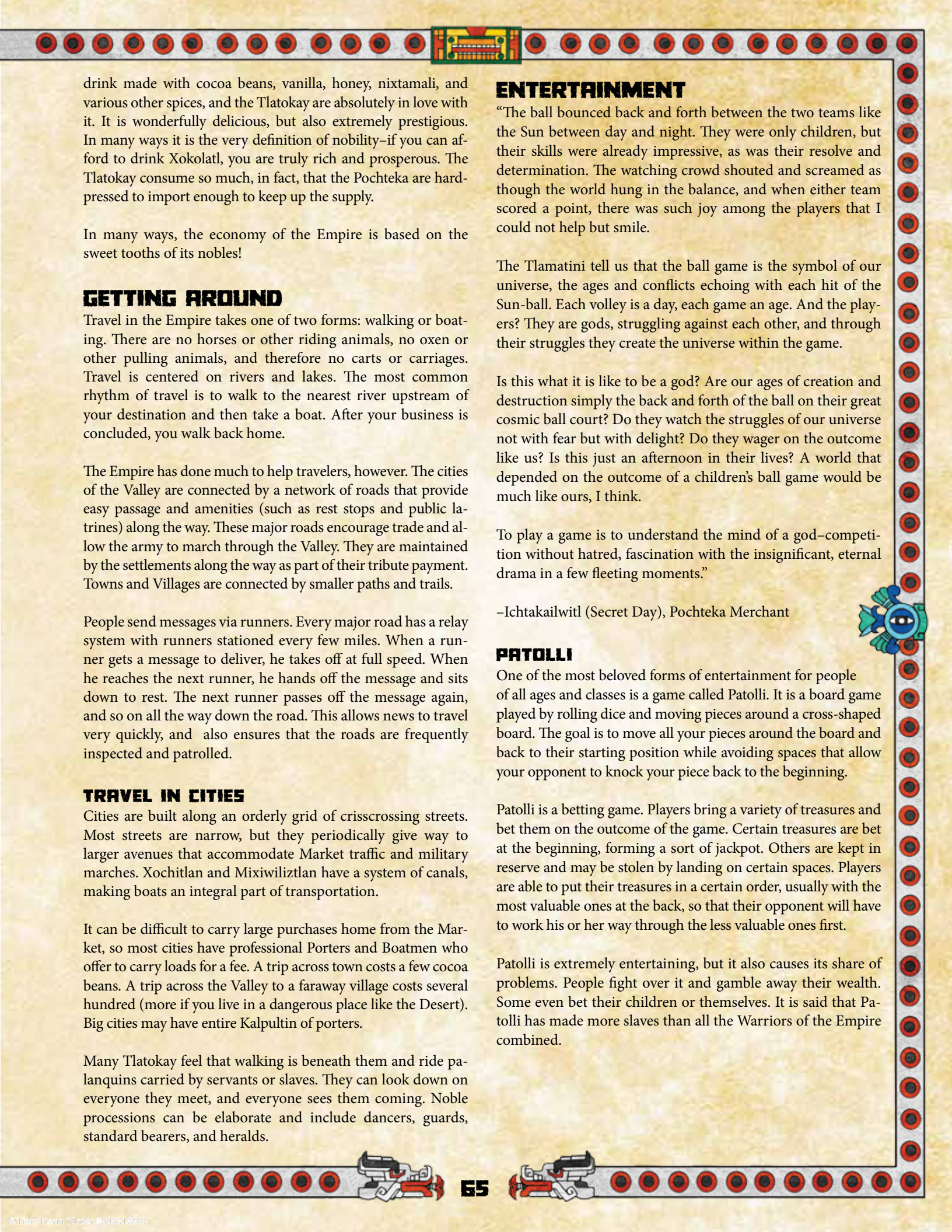
But there is one good in particular that is coveted in Markets across the land. It is always in demand, always valuable, and stands above all else as the currency of the Empire: cocoa beans.

People carry huge bags of cocoa beans to Market and count them out like money to pay for purchases. A single bean can get you a dozen tomatoes or chili peppers. Ten beans can get you a basket of maize ears. A hundred beans can get you a grown turkey or a square of fine cloth. The finest items, like turquoise or feather cloaks, cost several thousand beans.

Cocoa beans are extremely rare in the Valley. They are grown in the Jungle to the south and imported by special *Pochteka*. They are jealously coveted by the *Tlatokay*, who always accept them for payment of tribute. The *Pochteka* also prefer them because of their universal acceptance, and make an effort to buy and sell using cocoa beans as much as possible. They are credit with the tax collector and with the Merchants, and thus everyone accepts them.

The reason the *Tlatokay* accept cocoa beans as tribute is simple: *Xokolatl*, or Chocolate. *Xokolatl* in the Empire is a thick, frothy





drink made with cocoa beans, vanilla, honey, nixtamali, and various other spices, and the Tlatokay are absolutely in love with it. It is wonderfully delicious, but also extremely prestigious. In many ways it is the very definition of nobility—if you can afford to drink Xokolatl, you are truly rich and prosperous. The Tlatokay consume so much, in fact, that the Pochteka are hard-pressed to import enough to keep up the supply.

In many ways, the economy of the Empire is based on the sweet tooth of its nobles!

GETTING AROUND

Travel in the Empire takes one of two forms: walking or boating. There are no horses or other riding animals, no oxen or other pulling animals, and therefore no carts or carriages. Travel is centered on rivers and lakes. The most common rhythm of travel is to walk to the nearest river upstream of your destination and then take a boat. After your business is concluded, you walk back home.

The Empire has done much to help travelers, however. The cities of the Valley are connected by a network of roads that provide easy passage and amenities (such as rest stops and public latrines) along the way. These major roads encourage trade and allow the army to march through the Valley. They are maintained by the settlements along the way as part of their tribute payment. Towns and Villages are connected by smaller paths and trails.

People send messages via runners. Every major road has a relay system with runners stationed every few miles. When a runner gets a message to deliver, he takes off at full speed. When he reaches the next runner, he hands off the message and sits down to rest. The next runner passes off the message again, and so on all the way down the road. This allows news to travel very quickly, and also ensures that the roads are frequently inspected and patrolled.

TRAVEL IN CITIES

Cities are built along an orderly grid of crisscrossing streets. Most streets are narrow, but they periodically give way to larger avenues that accommodate Market traffic and military marches. Xochitlan and Mixiwiliztlan have a system of canals, making boats an integral part of transportation.

It can be difficult to carry large purchases home from the Market, so most cities have professional Porters and Boatmen who offer to carry loads for a fee. A trip across town costs a few cocoa beans. A trip across the Valley to a faraway village costs several hundred (more if you live in a dangerous place like the Desert). Big cities may have entire Kalpultin of porters.

Many Tlatokay feel that walking is beneath them and ride palanquins carried by servants or slaves. They can look down on everyone they meet, and everyone sees them coming. Noble processions can be elaborate and include dancers, guards, standard bearers, and heralds.

ENTERTAINMENT

“The ball bounced back and forth between the two teams like the Sun between day and night. They were only children, but their skills were already impressive, as was their resolve and determination. The watching crowd shouted and screamed as though the world hung in the balance, and when either team scored a point, there was such joy among the players that I could not help but smile.

The Tlamatini tell us that the ball game is the symbol of our universe, the ages and conflicts echoing with each hit of the Sun-ball. Each volley is a day, each game an age. And the players? They are gods, struggling against each other, and through their struggles they create the universe within the game.

Is this what it is like to be a god? Are our ages of creation and destruction simply the back and forth of the ball on their great cosmic ball court? Do they watch the struggles of our universe not with fear but with delight? Do they wager on the outcome like us? Is this just an afternoon in their lives? A world that depended on the outcome of a children's ball game would be much like ours, I think.

To play a game is to understand the mind of a god—competition without hatred, fascination with the insignificant, eternal drama in a few fleeting moments.”

—Ichtakailwitl (Secret Day), Pochteka Merchant

PATOLLI

One of the most beloved forms of entertainment for people of all ages and classes is a game called Patolli. It is a board game played by rolling dice and moving pieces around a cross-shaped board. The goal is to move all your pieces around the board and back to their starting position while avoiding spaces that allow your opponent to knock your piece back to the beginning.

Patolli is a betting game. Players bring a variety of treasures and bet them on the outcome of the game. Certain treasures are bet at the beginning, forming a sort of jackpot. Others are kept in reserve and may be stolen by landing on certain spaces. Players are able to put their treasures in a certain order, usually with the most valuable ones at the back, so that their opponent will have to work his or her way through the less valuable ones first.

Patolli is extremely entertaining, but it also causes its share of problems. People fight over it and gamble away their wealth. Some even bet their children or themselves. It is said that Patolli has made more slaves than all the Warriors of the Empire combined.





Each City has its own professional Ullamalitzli team, and the Cities play against one another. These “major league” games are extremely popular and are a source of great pride for a City. They are sometimes used as religious rituals or even alternatives to war. In these instances, players are sacrificed after the match to show gratitude to the gods for providing such a wonderful game as Ullamalitzli.

Nearly every neighborhood in the Empire has a small Ullamalitzli court, and most people play purely for fun. It is a popular activity for children and adults alike, and almost everyone grows up playing. Kalpultin also have “amateur” teams that compete with one another.

Amateur Ullamalitzli games are usually pretty friendly, but professional matches are as dangerous as battle. The ball is very heavy, and skilled players send it flying with tremendous speed. It can easily break arms and legs, and a hit to the head or stomach can be lethal. There are no rules against such hits, and victory by crippling or killing off your opponents is perfectly legitimate.

In addition to its entertainment value, Ullamalitzli is believed to be a microcosm of the universe. The ball represents the Sun, and the two teams represent Creation and Destruction. Diviners watch Ullamalitzli games because they can see the future through the movements of the ball and the outcome of the game. Important questions, such as whether to go to war or build a new palace or the like, are often decided through an Ullamalitzli game.

ULLAMALIZTLI - THE BALL GAME

Another major form of entertainment is a ball game called Ullamalitzli. It is played on an I-shaped court using a hard, heavy rubber ball that players strike with their hips. The two sides volley the ball back and forth, bouncing it off the walls and hitting it in ways designed to fool the other team. Points are awarded if your opponent is not able to return the ball before it bounces more than once.

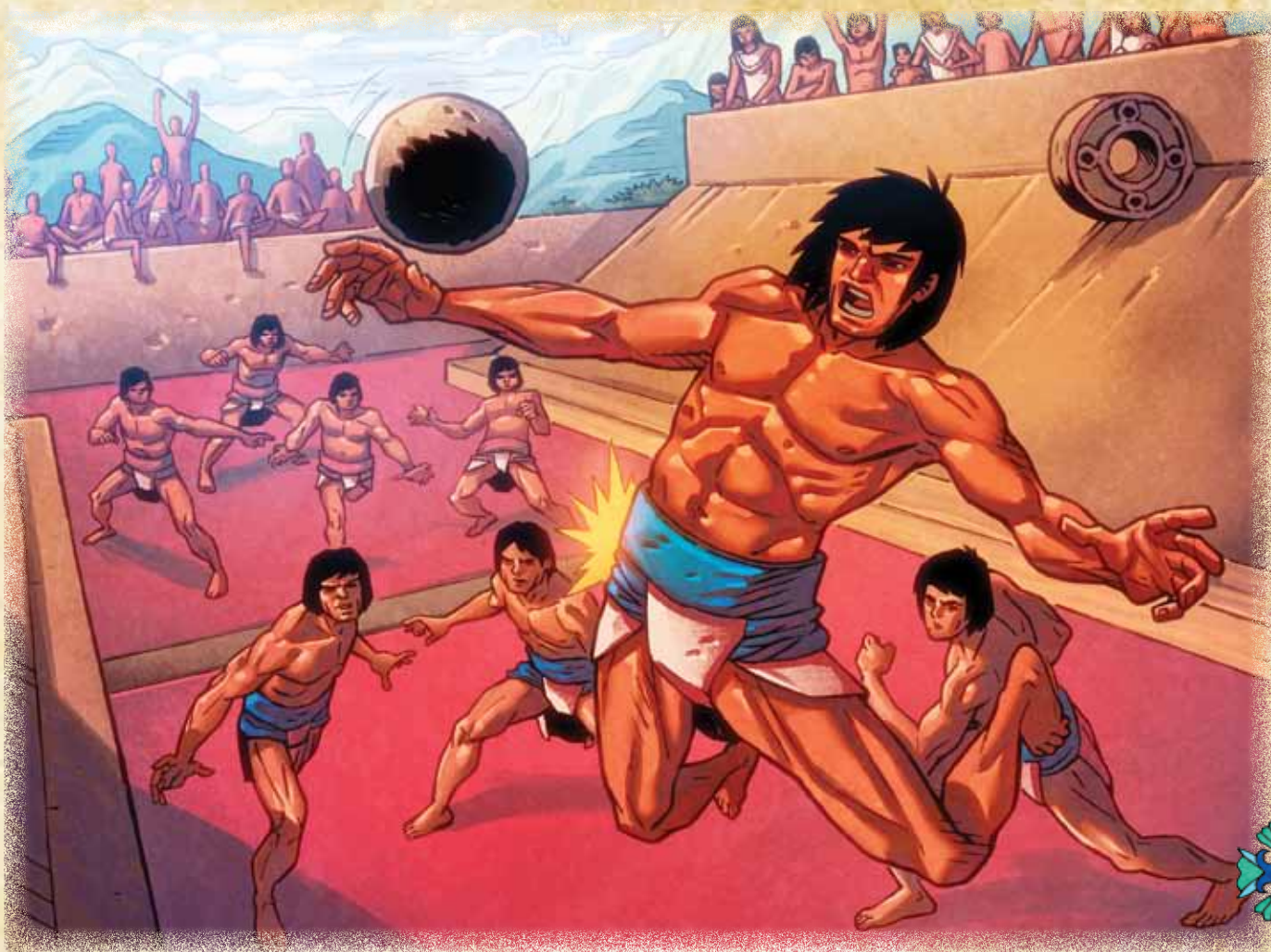
Additionally, teams can earn many points or automatic victory if they pass the ball through one of two stone rings on either side of the court. The rings are located in the middle and vary in size depending on the players' skill level.

OTHER FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT

In addition to Patolli and Ullamalitzli, there are countless other diversions in the Empire. Dancing, music, storytelling, wrestling, acrobatics, juggling, archery competitions, jokes and riddles, and many other games and spectacles are enthusiastically enjoyed by all.

Most of life is a serious matter, full of hard work, discipline, and sacrifice, but this only makes people appreciate joy and fun even more! The motto of most is “Work hard, play hard.”





JUSTICE

Justice in the Empire is stern and unforgiving. The population is spirited and consists of countless different groups and factions, many of which do not much care for one another, so a light touch simply will not do. Judges are responsible for maintaining order, ensuring productivity, and ending any internal conflicts before they begin. The ideal Judge performs her duties fairly but ruthlessly.

HIERARCHY OF JUDGES

Ultimately, justice in the Empire is the domain of the Tonalsi-watl. She is the Supreme Lawmaker and Judge. She can over-rule any others and hear any cases she wishes. She can also appoint lesser Judges and pass decrees to guide them. Her power is absolute, but she generally adheres to tradition.

Like the rest of society, justice exists in a hierarchy. Kalpuli Judges elected by the community resolve disputes between Households. Tlatokay Judges appointed by the local Tlatoani rule on cases between Kalpultin. Imperial Judges appointed by the Tonalsi-watl handle disputes between cities.

LAWS

Laws in the Empire are a combination of decrees from current and former Tonalsi-watls and local Tlatoanis, judicial precedent, and age-old tradition. Some are pretty basic—do not murder, steal, commit adultery, etc. Others are more complicated—Masewaltin may not wear cotton, Tilmatlis may not be longer than knee-length unless they are concealing a war wound, and so on. Children learn about the laws of their community in school, and any changes are announced in the Market.

Rather than recording specific wordings of specific laws, the people of the Empire study the cases and rulings of famous Judges and Tonalsi-watls from ages past and use them as guidance. Judges are selected for their wisdom as well as their knowledge of these past decisions, and are traditionally left free to consider each case individually and make rulings at their discretion.

It is possible to appeal a ruling, in which case it is considered by the next highest level of the Justice hierarchy. Judges prefer not to overturn each other, so they only grant appeals when there is a clear miscarriage of justice. In those rare cases, the errant Judge faces punishment as well.



BASIC CODE OF LAWS



Here are some of the most universal laws of the Empire. Individual cities may have exceptions to these laws or additional local laws, but these are generally the norm.

A few quick notes: firstly, there is a distinction between what is 'legal' and what is 'honorable.' Just because something is forbidden by law doesn't necessarily mean it's dishonorable to do it. And just because something is legal doesn't mean it's honorable to do it.

Secondly, criminals are never sentenced to die as human sacrifices. Execution for a crime is almost always beheading. Being sacrificed is a tremendous honor, granted only to those

who have proven their worth. Offering a loathsome criminal as a sacrifice would be a tremendous insult to the gods. If a person causes a spiritual problem, he might be asked to sacrifice himself to appease the offended god. But a murderer sentenced to death would never be sacrificed.

Lastly, the punishment for Tlatokay criminals is always worse than the punishment for Masewaltin. In fact, it is almost always death. Tlatokay enjoy great privilege, but because of this they are held to a much higher standard. If a Masewal acts in a lowly fashion, it is not unexpected--he is a lowly Masewal! But Tlatokay have no excuse for criminality, and therefore receive no mercy.

ENFORCEMENT

Judges have a contingent of constables to enforce their decisions. These constables may be selected by the Judge or elected by the community (each place has its own custom). They are responsible for keeping an eye out for law breakers, reporting crimes to the Judge, and carrying out her decrees.

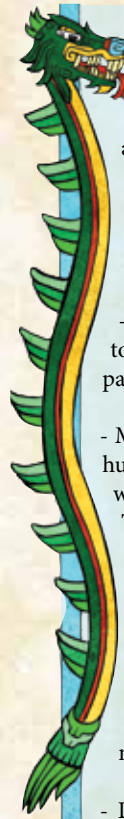
Enforcement is rarely a problem since communities are so tight knit. There are few secrets, and if a person breaks the law everybody will know about it and do their part to bring the offender to justice. After all, if you steal from your neighbors you are stealing from your own relatives. Constables serve as messengers, bailiffs, and executioners more than anything else, and keep watch for troublemaking outsiders (most crime in the Empire comes from outsiders to a community).

ONE'S OWN ADVOCATE

There are no lawyers in the Empire. Ideally, every adult speaks for him or herself, since being able to speak in public is part of adulthood, and refusing to do so brings great shame. In practice, each Household speaks for itself, and may appointing its best speaker to speak for all members (this is usually the domain of the father). But the flipside of this is that the Household bears the consequences of its members' actions.

There are a few other cases where a person might speak on behalf of another. A Warrior may speak on behalf of a fellow from his Warrior House and a Priest may speak for another from her Order. But any advocate is required by tradition to share the fate of the one he or she represents. If you argue on behalf of a friend and lose, you will share in the friend's sentence.

BASIC CODE OF LAWS (CONT.)



- Do not commit murder. Murderers are beheaded. A murderer's Household is accountable for the crime, and other members may be executed as well. The Household is beholden to the victim's Household for many years. Approved human sacrifice, orders to kill from the ruling Tlatokay, and self-defense are not considered murder.

- Do not steal. Masewaltin thieves are beaten and forced to serve as slaves in their victims' Households until they pay for what they stole. Tlatokay thieves are beheaded.

- Masewaltin must dress simply and carry themselves in a humble fashion before their superiors. Impudent Masewaltin are beaten, and their illegal clothing is destroyed. The privilege of wearing fine clothing, sandals, and beautiful jewelry must be earned. Punishment is usually doled out by any Tlatokay who witness the offense.

- Do not commit adultery. The adulterer's spouse gets to choose the punishment for this crime: month long vows of silence, public beatings at the hands of the Kalpuli children, and death by whipping are some of the more common punishments chosen.

- Do not get drunk in public. Masewaltin offenders are beaten severely, and their houses are destroyed. Tlatokay offenders are beheaded.

- Do not carry weapons within a city. Aside from constables and on-duty guards, all weapons must be stored at a city armory, or they will be confiscated. Resistance to confiscation is punishable by death. Note: bows, atlatls, slings, knives, and spears are considered tools, not weapons. It is still inappropriate to walk around the city with them, but you may keep them at home to be used for hunting, fishing, and the like.



ALTEPETLS

CITY-STATES OF THE EMPIRE

Though the Empire functions as one large nation, it is actually a union of Altepetl City-States, each independently ruling over its own network of towns and villages. These Altepetls are divided into three basic tiers: Ruling Cities, Allied Cities, and Tributary Cities.

The most prestigious are the three Ruling Cities: Xochitlan, Mixiwilztlán, and Teoyezteko. Each is ruled by a Tonalteka Tekali and commands vast influence across the Empire.

Beneath the Ruling Cities are the three Allied Cities: Tlatlahako, Ilwikakalko, and Popokatetlan. These cities are each ruled by a Tlatteka Tekali, and while they are permitted to rule themselves, they are required to pay tribute to the Ruling Cities and must answer their calls for service. They have a say in the affairs of the Empire, but they are less influential than the Ruling Cities.

Beneath the Allied Cities are the Tributary Cities. There are many such cities and towns in the world, including Tzatziko, Iwitlan, and Atzkalko. Tributary Cities have the least amount of influence in the Empire. They are required to handle their own local affairs (or face punishment for lack of productivity), but they do not get a say in how the Empire is run. Their place is to obey. They pay steep tribute to the Ruling Cities, and they provide troops and supplies for war.

Each City consists of several Kalpultin, one Tekali and many subordinate Kalpultin. Sometimes these subordinate Kalpultin have a few Tlatokay families of their own, but their task is always to help the Tekali rule more effectively.

Each Altepetl is also home to an Order of Priests who live in the Sacred Precinct at the center and look after the Altepetl's gods. The Priestly Order is almost like another Kalpuli. It has its own lands and internal hierarchy, and specializes in the art of divine mediation. However, nobody is born into a Priestly Order; they consist entirely of people from other Kalpultin or even other Altepetls.

THE THREE RULING CITIES

The Empire of the Sun is ruled by an alliance of three Tonalteka cities: Xochitlan, Mixiwilztlán, and Teoyezteko. These cities are the ultimate recipients of all tribute in the Empire, and they divide it amongst themselves.

Xochitlan takes the largest share because it is the home of the Wey Tlatoani, the Supreme General of the Empire. It is the sacred home of all Tonalteka people. Mixiwilztlán takes the next largest share. Teoyezteko, the least prestigious of the three cities, takes the smallest share.

Naturally, this inequity leads to a great deal of competition between the Ruling Cities. Ancient tradition forbids them from fight-

ing each other directly--after all, warfare between the Tonalteka is what led to their banishment from the Valley long ago. But there is no end to the intrigue and jockeying for position as Xochitlan struggles to stay on top while the other two strive to take over.

XOCHITLAN, PLACE OF FLOWERS, THE CITY ON THE LAKE

"There is no place in all the world more beautiful, wealthy, or magnificent than Xochitlan, capitol of the Empire of the Sun. It is like something out of a dream. It floats upon Lake Ketzalatezcatl like a lily pad, rising and falling with the water level but always remaining on top. Clouds reflected in the water drift all around it, making it seem more heavenly than earthly.

Xochitlan is a great floating garden in the sky, a living tribute to the gods and a gift to humanity. It is the place where Heaven meets Earth."

--Nekawal (Survivor), Tlamatini of Xochitlan

OVERVIEW

Xochitlan is the promised land of the Tonalteka. It was their refuge during the reign of the Kakayawani, and while the other Tonalteka have left to found their own cities, Xochitlan will always be their true home.

Its name means "Place of Flowers," and nothing could be more appropriate. Beautiful, fragrant flowers are everywhere. Flowery garlands line the major thoroughfares, changed daily by the schoolchildren. Blossoms of every color spill forth from each home garden like water from a spring. Even the people are adorned with flowers. They wear them like living and dying jewels.

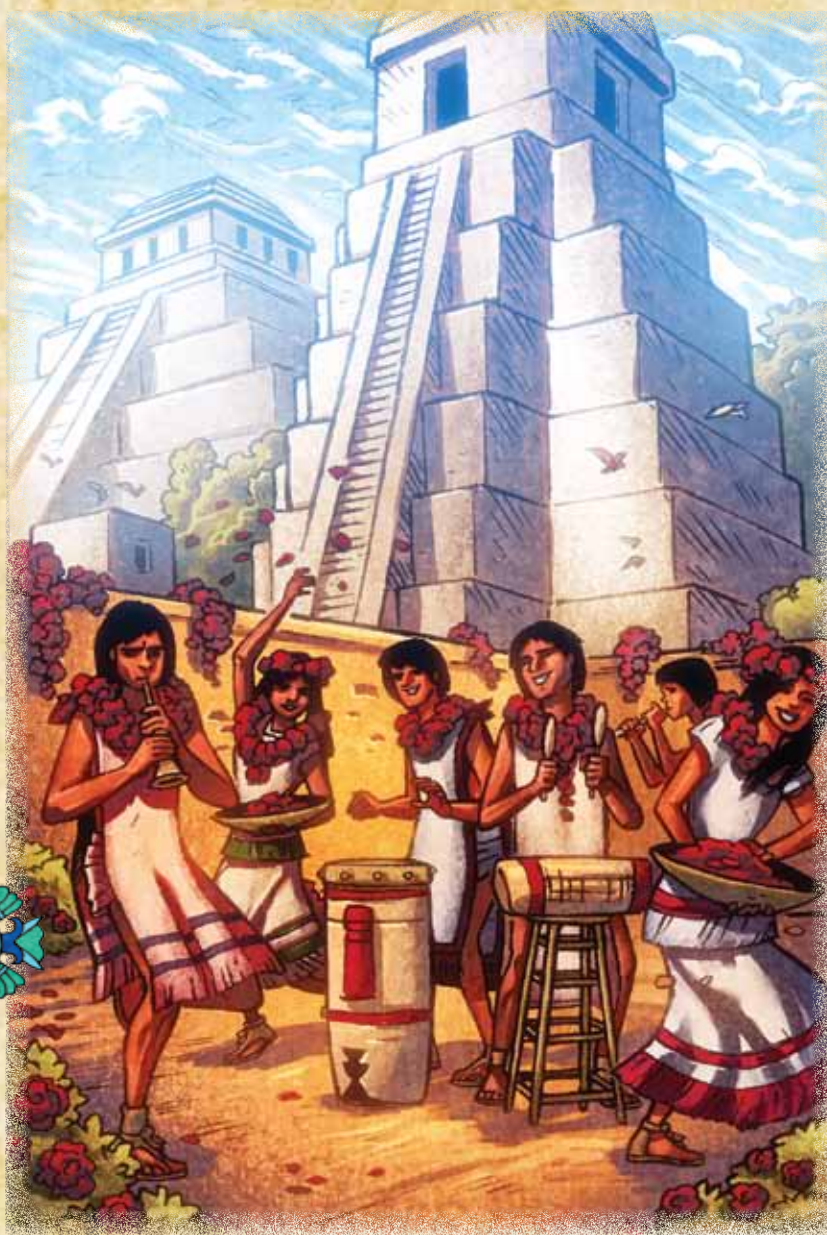
Every flower is a celebration of life and beauty, but also a warning that life is short and beauty is fleeting. Flowers bloom, live, and die, just as people and nations do. No flower blooms forever, and no City rules forever, but the people of Xochitlan strive to make life as wonderful as possible for as long as they can.

LAYOUT

Xochitlan is as much water as it is land. Originally built on a small, swampy island in the middle of Lake Ketzalatezcatl, the founders Xochitlan had to deal with a most unusual environment. But instead of fighting it, they embraced it. They built canals instead of streets and bridges. They created islands using rich soil from the lakebed. They turned the weaknesses of their homeland into strengths, and today they are the envy of the Empire.

Xochitlan has regular streets as well, and within each neighborhood people get around on foot. But most travel takes place by boat using the city's extensive network of canals. They are laid out on an orderly grid that divides up the neighborhoods while





Xochitlan has five sectioned causeways connecting it to shore. Each wooden causeway is several miles long and wide enough for ten men to march abreast. Periodic gaps allow boats to pass through, and aqueducts bring in fresh water from distant mountain springs. The sections can be separated, allowing Xochitlan to turn Lake Ketzalatezkatl into one big moat in the event of an attack.

CULTURE

Around 100,000 people live in Xochitlan, making it one of the biggest Altepetls in the Empire and the entire world. Its only rivals in size are Mixiwilztlán to the south and the Kakayawani capital to the west. Like any Altepetl, the majority of people are farmers, but Xochitlan also supports a huge population of elite artists, singers, and nobles because it receives tribute from the entire Empire.

The people of Xochitlan believe very strongly that their beautiful city is the center of the universe. It is located in the very center of Semanawak, connecting Earth to the Sky. Each noon, the Sun passes directly over Xochitlan. All rivers flow into the Lake that surround it, and carry all the trade goods of the Empire. This creates a tremendous sense of civic pride among city residents, who work hard to make and keep their city the very best in the Empire. But it also means that outsiders often find their pride and arrogance irritating.

Xochitlan is very cosmopolitan. There are residents from almost every Kalpuli in the Empire, and travelers come from all over the world. It is also very rigid, with strong, strictly enforced class distinctions. Nowhere is nobility taken more seriously than in Xochitlan. Masewaltin must bow and offer elaborate flatteries to any Tlatokay they encounter, every time they encounter them. They must recite flowery noble titles in their entirety ("Her Supreme Radiance, Guardian of Justice and Good, Mother of the Righteous Le-

connecting them to each other and to the Lake. Transporting goods in Xochitlan is supremely easy. Simply load them up into a canoe and paddle them right to your door!

It is difficult to transport an entire army by boat, however, so



We have chosen to focus in detail on a few Kalpultin for each Altepetl. We have tried to feature those which are prominent or at least interesting in some way, in order to provide a variety of perspectives for Players to approach the setting. However, you may safely assume that each Altepetl has many more Kalpultin than are listed here. Even the smallest Altepetls have around five Kalpultin, and larger ones like Xochitlan or Mixiwilztlán may have fifteen to twenty. If you can't find one you like, feel free to create your own--membership in the same Kalpuli is an excellent basis for a New Fire group.

One other thing to keep in mind: people are shaped by their origins and by the group they identify with, but they are not defined by them. Each City and each Kalpuli has a character, a stereotype that summarizes its most memorable beliefs, actions, and statements. These stereotypes exist for a reason, and more often than not a member will share at least some of these Kalpuli traits. But every community contains within it every kind of individual, so do not be afraid to contradict the norm.



gions, Master of All Who Live Within the Light of Tletoxi-wakan"). And if they disobey or try to take any short cuts, they are severely punished.

On the other hand, those who are able to please the Tlatokay of Xochitlan are lavishly rewarded. Nowhere else are artists more revered or better paid. The city is filled with extremely rich Tlatokay who wish to be forever surrounded by beauty, and those who can fulfill their wishes live a life of happiness and leisure.

HOW THE PEOPLE OF XOCHITLAN SEE OTHER ALTEPETLS

Mixiwiliztlan - They are many, and the vast amounts of food they produce gives them great influence. But in their hearts they are servants, not rulers. If they did not give us our due, we would take it.

Teoyezteko - Such ambition! It would be admirable if they were not so consumed with vengeance. They are our most important ally and also our greatest rival. Their obsession is a hole in the bottom of the Empire through which all our wealth and glory will hole if we are not careful.

Ilwikakalko - Great words are admirable, but they are a poor substitute for great deeds. Small wonder that their greatest songs are about us!

Popokatetlan - We admire their honesty and sincerity. They are not afraid to demand what they want. Such a shame that all they ever seem to want is money...

Tlatlahako - Their knowledge and insight are most valuable, and they accept their place beneath us. If only the Tributary Cities could learn from their example!

LANDMARKS

All the temples of Xochitlan are large and magnificent, built from the wealth of the city and the devotion of its people. But at the very center, towering above all others, is the great temple pyramid of Weysitlalin, Goddess of the Sun. It is visible from almost anywhere in the Valley. Its whitewashed walls gleam in the light like a great beacon, like a miniature Sun floating in the Lake.

The pyramid of Weysitlalin was built relatively recently, but it has grown into one of the largest in the Valley. Each Tonalsi-watl added onto it at least once during her rule. It is one of the few pyramids in the Valley that was not built over an old Kakayawani pyramid. Only Tonalteka rulers are buried there, and only Tonalteka idols have lived upon it. It is the pure heart of the Tonalteka Empire, the conduit through which their light flows.

The twin palaces of the Wey Tlatoani and the Tonalsi-watl also rise high above the city. These two huge buildings house the government of the Empire, and their gradeur clearly demonstrates the authority it commands. The two palaces are roughly equal in size, but serve very different purposes.

THOUGHTS ABOUT XOCHITLAN

"Xochitlan is a place dedicated to beauty and joy, to the things that make life worth living. Simply existing in that city will show you the meaning of life."

--Tonalnan (Mother of Light), Flower Singer of Ilwikakalko

"To rule is to be hated. Whether they are jealous, vengeful, ambitious, or simply desire your attention, people always focus on the ones who rise above them. Whether times are good or bad, they will despise you. Whether you rule wisely or unwisely, they will question you. That is the price of power. But never forget: no matter how badly they hurt you and no matter how much you might hate them, it is, and always will be, your duty to rule them justly."

--Moyolewani (Enamored One), Elder Tlatokay speaking to his son upon retirement

"The flowers of Xochitlan are beautiful, but even they cannot cover up the stench of death and decay that wafts from that accursed place. They call it a place of beauty, a gift to humanity. But only the chosen few are allowed into that garden. Their blossoms grow from our bones, from our blood. We must suffer eternally for it. And the Tlatokay expect us to take comfort in the fact that our suffering lets them live well?"

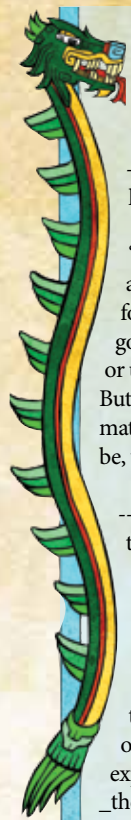
--Zolin (Quail), Kwatike Warlord, to the Warriors of his village

The Wey Tlatoani's palace houses the elite Warriors and generals of the army. It keeps them well cared for, close at hand, and loyal. It has large halls where people host feasts and parties. It has sprawling courtyards for speeches and friendly competitions. Trophies of war adorn the walls: banners of famous heroes, weapons used to accomplish great feats, bones of defeated allies and enemies, and tokens of victory over the many subject cities. Every Warrior dreams of displaying a trophy in the Wey Tlatoani's palace.

The Tonalsi-watl's palace houses the vast numbers of bureaucrats and administrative officials necessary to keep Xochitlan and the Empire functioning. It has courtrooms and antechambers where the Tonalsi-watl and her judges can hear cases and resolve disputes, meeting rooms where Nobles can negotiate deals and organize the projects they are given (new architecture, licenses and permits, rewards for those who have served well, and so on), vast storerooms where the tribute of the Empire is held, and lodgings for everyone.

NOTABLE FESTIVAL

Xochitlan is a place of great religious significance. As the home of the Sun on Earth, it is host to a variety of Sun rituals, solstice and equinox festivals, new year rituals, and so on. But probably the most beloved celebration is the Flower Festival, held following the bloom of the Akokotli flowers (tree Dahlia) in the Tonalsi-watl's garden. These flowers blossom at a different time





each year. The celebration begins as soon as they open and lasts five full days.

The Flower Festival is a celebration of art, beauty, and pleasure. It is sponsored by the goddess Kwekweponiwitl (Blooming Feather), patron of artists and lovers. The finest artisans, crafters, and musicians gather to share their best works and demonstrate to the goddess that her inspiration has been put to good use. They also seek to earn the attention of Tlatokay patrons for future work and gain respect and fame from ordinary people. Regardless of skill level, everybody who attends must bring an object of beauty.

Works of art are displayed in the Market for all to see. Admiration infuses the objects with life and adds to their magnificence. Flower Singers and musicians from all over the Empire perform, sharing their most precious dreams with the people. Many of the traditional restrictions on sex and sensual indulgences are relaxed during the festival, allowing everyone to embrace the fleeting moment and seek unfettered joy. It is the most fun, exciting, and moving event of the year.

The beauty does not last long, however. At the end of the five days, all the pieces of art are taken into the Sacred Precinct and sacrificed to Kwekweponiwitl to show gratitude for the joy she brings. All the adoration the objects received goes back to her so she will continue to provide beauty and inspiration to the world.

In addition to objects, sometimes the artists and singers volunteer themselves as sacrifices. They live for five days as gods, adored and worshipped by the attendees and given the opportunity to share anything they wish. It is a moment of unparalleled glory for the artists, an opportunity to display their greatest works before an infinitely appreciative audience.

But then, at the end of the festival, the artists are sacrificed by having their wrists opened. If the artist is a Singer or musician, he or she is allowed to perform from the top of Kwekweponiwitl's temple until dead. If the artist is a crafter or sculptor, he or she works until dropping. Many great artists have died at the Flower Festival of Xochitlan, ending their careers in glory rather than retiring. It is the ideal finale to a life spent in pursuit of beauty.

GODS OF XOCHITLAN

Center	Waysitlalin, "Great Star," goddess of the Sun.
East	Teoxotlani, "Lighter of the Sacred Flame," warrior god and protector of the Sun.
West	Chokanantzin, "Weeping Mother," goddess of dusk and mortal enemy of Waysitlalin.
North	Tlewachtli, "Fire Seed," god of fire and rebirth.
South	Kwekweponiwitl, "Blooming Feather," goddess of art, beauty, love, and pleasure.

NOTABLE KALPULTIN OF XOCHITLAN

XOCHITEKA, THE FLOWER PEOPLE

Tekali of Xochitlan	
Heritage:	Strong Tlalteka
Size:	Small (around ten Households)
Trades:	Land Management, Patronage, Art

The Xochiteka are the noblest of the noble, the oldest Tonalteka Tekaltin in the entire Empire. They were the very first to return to the Valley after the Time of Wandering, and it was they who first founded Xochitlan. This fact is evident in their attitudes towards the other Tekaltin--many Xochiteka still regard others as guests in their domain.

STORIES OF OLD

"Long ago, our ancestors were born from the womb of First Woman at Tleteoxiwakan, and they emerged into an immense flowery meadow. There were Akokotli flowers, Kwetlaxochitl, Sunflowers, Orchids, and every other flower the gods ever dreamed of. The goddess Kwekweponiwitl welcomed them to this garden, her voice rustling through the flowers like a gentle breeze:

'Between these flowers exists all the beauty in the world. Many have lived and died in sadness and longing before you, but their blood has created this wonderful and joyous place.

This is your inheritance, my hummingbirds, my butterflies! You were fortunate enough to be born into a world of happiness and ease. You may live here forever, young and undying and surrounded by ever-blooming loveliness, so long as at least one flower remains. And all these blossoms, all these moments of bliss, will last forever, never fading. Unless they are picked.

Once picked, a flower will die. It will last a short while, and for that short while it will be yours alone, and you may enjoy it. But then it will be gone forever.

I now give you eternity, or until the last flower dies.'

Our ancestors ventured forth into the meadow and lived happily for fifty-two years. They lounged among the flowers, nursed their nectar, laughed with their brothers and sisters, and sang. The flowers were beautiful and enticing, but they heeded the words of the goddess and left them in the ground.

But prolonged happiness does not come easily to humans. Looking at a river is not the same as swimming in it. Smelling a tortilla is not the same as eating it. Watching a flower is not the same as having it.



One day, a man named Xochipepe (Flower Gatherer) was seen wearing a single flower in his hair. Everybody stared as he walked by, for though they had lived for ages surrounded by beauty, none had ever possessed it. Several others picked flowers to wear in their hair to be as beautiful as Xochipepe. Then they picked two flowers, one to put behind each ear. Then three to tie into bracelets. Then four to make garlands.

Before long, everyone was picking flowers and crafting them into the most beautiful ornaments and jewels. Some built houses of flowers. Some created clothes, weaving together blossoms to wrap themselves completely in beauty and life. The meadow was large, but there were many people and they each picked many flowers. Soon there were none left in the ground. They experienced an eternity of beautiful moments in a single day.

But after a few days, the flowers slowly began to wither. The bracelets and necklaces shriviled and dropped off. The clothes turned brown and dry and crumbled away. The houses sank and collapsed into drying, rotting heaps. The people tried everything they could think of to keep the flowers alive. They put them in water, they returned them to the ground, and they begged and pleaded. But despite this, they all died and crumbled into dust, leaving our ancestors naked, hungry, and alone in an empty, barren desert.

Kwekweponiwił's voice blew sadly in on the breeze, raising a cloud of dust as she spoke:

'A flower in the ground is a moment waiting to happen. To pick a flower is to live that moment. But moments pass. You are picked flowers now, my hummingbirds, my butterflies.

You are now seeds seeking a new land in which to root. You may find a new place, as long as you do not perish on the wind. But from now on, the only flowers you see shall be the ones you grow yourselves."

--Nekawal (Survivor), Tlamatini of Xochitlan

OVERVIEW

The Xochiteka are a people of contradictions. They have amassed great power, yet they fear it. They seek beauty with an almost desperate passion, yet they know it will fade. They are haunted by their flowery symbol, by the knowledge that their glory is fleeting and must one day come to an end. They alternate between periods of aggression (where they expand to prove that they are still ascending) and periods of terrible, bleak serenity (where they accept and even embrace their own demise).

Despite their power and the beauty that surrounds them, few Xochiteka are truly happy. They are acutely aware that there is no escape from the cycle of life and death, yet they must sustain society for everyone. They have much to lose and little left to gain. They grow many flowers but fear to pick them.

But despite their fatalistic attitude, Xochiteka believe that it is their duty to see that flowers are grown and that life is filled with as much happiness and beauty as possible.

The Xochiteka have a reputation for being unforgiving. They take their responsibilities very seriously and come down hard on Tlatokay who fall short of the expectations of their class. They demand complete loyalty from their subordinates, not just passive obedience, but active signs of submission and reverence. Every interaction between Tlatokay and Masewaltin must include ritualized displays that prove the loyalty of the Masewaltin and the supremacy of the Xochiteka. Everything and everyone has a place, and that is what allows society to function.

The Wey Tlatoani and Tonalsiwatl always have Xochiteka heritage on at least one side. In the early days of the Empire, the Xochiteka ruled even more rigidly, allowing only full-blooded Xochiteka to ascend to the highest offices. But over time it has become customary for the Imperial Rulers to share blood with the other Tonalteka Tekaltin.

The Xochiteka have few simple relationships with other Kalpul-tin. They are rulers, protectors, and oppressors all at once. The good they do is taken for granted, the bad they do inspires hatred, and the riches they possess invite envy and jealousy from everyone.

Against outsiders, they are staunch allies of the other Tonalteka Tekaltin. Within the Empire, they compete for power. The Tlalteka seek their favor and rewards while constantly watching for weakness and the opportunity to rebel. Ultimately, they can trust no one but themselves. And even that is not always true.

VIRTUES, VICES, AND WORDS OF THE OLD ONES

Good manners are the greatest virtue a person can possess. The image you put forth defines you. You cannot claim greatness while behaving like a barbarian. But if you appear honest, honorable, and respected, others will instinctively obey, and the power of nobility will be yours to wield. And if you strive to truly possess these traits, you will wield your power wisely.

Of all the failings a Tlatokay can possess, Guilt is undoubtedly the worst. Quite simply, power exists, and it was given to you. It is your duty to wield and protect it. Refusal to use your power does not eliminate its existence. It simply means that someone else will use it in your stead, and those who seek the power of others are often the least deserving of it. You were given your power for a reason. You must become wise and honorable, and wield it to the best of your ability.





AMILPIXKI, THE WATER GARDENERS

Kalpuli	
Heritage:	Strong Tlalteka
Size:	Large (around 1000 Households)
Trades:	Farming

The Amilpixki are one of the largest Kalpultin in Xochitlan. For as long as there have been humans on Earth, the Amilpixki have lived on Lake Ketzalatezkatl. And come what may, they are determined to never leave their watery homeland or let any harm come to it.

STORIES OF OLD

"Our home, the Lake in the Valley, is a place of happiness and joy, but it was not always so. Once, long ago, this was a place of great sadness, a place of tears. It was the place where the rain goddess Elopiliztli came to weep.

The world was a barren place back then. Wars had devastated the land, leaving no towns or villages, no people or animals, and no grass or trees. The loss of so much life made Elopiliztli sad, so she came here to weep each day, crying bitter, brackish tears of sorrow. Her tears gathered in the great basin of the Valley and formed the Lake.

But one day, after she finished weeping, Elopiliztli turned to leave, and as she climbed over the mountains and out of the Valley she knocked several rocks into her pool of tears. These rocks sprouted like seeds, and from them our ancestors were born.

When Elopiliztli returned, she saw our people living in her Lake. She saw that they had planted flowers and grown maize. She saw that they had built houses and raised children. And she saw that the Lake had made them happy. Her sorrow had given them a home.

Elopiliztli began to cry again, but this time her tears were pure, fresh tears of happiness. As they fell into the Lake, our ancestors looked up and sang to the goddess:

"Give us your sorrow, Elopiliztli, and we will turn it into blossoms! We will turn it into delicious maize! We will turn it into gardens, so that when you leave you will no longer be sad!"

So now, whenever the sorrows of other lands make her cry, Elopiliztli comes to the Valley and brings the rains with her. And whenever she looks down on our water garden and sees her sadness turned to beauty, her tears turn fresh and pure from happiness."

--Ixchel (Rainbow Lady), Midwife of the Amilpixki

OVERVIEW

Though the Xochiteka founded Xochitlan, it is the Amilpixki that allowed it to be built. They have lived on and around Lake Ketzalatezkatl for as long as anyone can remember, and they are unrivaled masters of aquatic architecture and farming. They shared their knowledge and techniques with the Xochiteka when both were Mayekay serfs of the Kakayawani, and without these techniques there would be no Xochitlan.

The Amilpixki are traditionally a very open and welcoming people. Travelers have always come to the Lake to trade, and therefore it benefits the Amilpixki to be friendly to newcomers. They are quick to share the bounty of their lush land, and work very hard to accommodate guests (a little too hard, by some standards). Their stories are filled with characters who succeed not through might or bravery or even luck, but through selfless generosity. They must be pushed very far before they resort to violence.

Because of this, they suffered terribly under the rule of the Kakayawani, who could not be moved by generosity and instead took it as a sign that there was more to take. Their numbers dwindled as the Kakayawani literally worked them to death. Since the arrival of the Tonalteka, they have been most grateful, and have become some of the most ardent supporters of the People of Light.

The Amilpixki keep to themselves and remain on good terms with most other Kalpultin. Their only major rivals are the Akamilteka of the shores. They quarrel frequently over proper use and management of the Lake and over age-old disputes that predate the Empire.

The friendship between the Amilpixki and the Xochiteka is legendary, if a little one-sided. The Xochiteka treat their Amilpixki subjects well. They give them lots of land, grant them much leeway, and offer frequent rewards for their service. But they still treat them as subjects, as a foundation over which other things may be built. They treat them as a *resource*. Some Amilpixki seek greater glory to elevate their Kalpuli, but few get the chance.

Most, however, do not seek greater glory. Amilpixki tradition dictates that people should stay near home and care for their families. No water leaves Lake Ketzalatezkatl or travels against the flow of the rivers, and no Amilpixki should either. The Lake is the center, and in many ways the entirety, of the Amilpixki world. Most of them aspire to live their entire lives without setting foot on shore. This is rarely possible, but it is an important ideal.

VIRTUES, VICES, AND WORDS OF THE OLD ONES

Lake Ketzalatezkatl was not filled in a day. Maize does not mature overnight. True wealth and happiness are things that grow over time. A river's worth of water may fall with every rain storm, but



you will never find it by chasing raindrops. Instead, be Patient. Find where the water must flow and wait for it, like a caiman waiting for prey to drift by. Do not cling to things that come too easily, for they likely arrived by mistake. True value only comes from the things you grow yourself.

It is easy to talk to the travelers and feel envy for their glamorous lives. But they are still searching, still starving. Do not envy such wanderers, because you already possess what they most desire: a Home. Lake Ketzalatezkatl is a place of such peace. Listen to the gentle waves, feel the cool breeze, see the flicker of the Sun off the rippling surface, and you will forget all troubles. The Lake gives us all that we need and more. So long as we care for her, she will do so forever.

MIXIWILIZTLAN, THE LAND WHERE CHILDREN ARE BORN

“Mixiwiliztlan, your landscape is Maize”

--Teoxiwitl (Precious Turquoise), Singing Priestess of Ilwikakalko

OVERVIEW

Mixiwiliztlan is the center of agriculture in the Empire. It produces a tremendous amount of food, which it trades with the rest of the Empire and uses to supply the army. In addition, it manages the favor of the agricultural gods on behalf of the entire Empire. The Corn Priests of Mixiwiliztlan go to great, sometimes terrifying lengths to ensure that the gods are appeased in order to ensure that fields in all Altepetls prosper.

Mixiwiliztlan is one of the oldest cities known. It is said that, after they were created at Tleteoxiwakan, First Man and First Woman came to Mixiwiliztlan to build their house and raise the First Family, and that the city grew up around that house. Xochitlan is the promised land of the Tonalteka, Mixiwiliztlan is the house where they were born.

After the Ancient Tonalteka left the Valley, the Kakayawani built their own city over the top of Mixiwiliztlan and claimed its sacred history as their own. When the Tonalteka reclaimed the Valley, they built yet another city over the top of the old Kakayawani ruins. Mixiwiliztlan is layer upon layer of history. The older layers slowly sink into the wet ground as they drift further and further into the past.

LAYOUT

The city itself is a huge, sprawling settlement located along the marshy southern shore of Lake Ketzalatezkatl at the mouth of the Water Serpent River. It is built in a fertile seasonal flood



zone, and so it changes greatly over the course of year depending on the water level.

During the Wet Season, the city floods and becomes very much like Xochitlan. Canals and bridges connect its vast network of stilted buildings and manmade islands. During the Dry Season, the waters recede, opening up farm land fertilized by the flood water. This dynamic, varied environment allows Mixiwiliztlan to grow the greatest variety of crops in the Empire.

It is difficult to tell where the city ends. There is a large Sacred Precinct and dense group of Tlatokay houses built atop a small hill in the center, but all around it are Masewal houses scattered across the landscape, interspersed with countless farm plots. Several neighborhoods were once independent towns, but have long since been integrated into one continuous settlement that just seems to blend into the landscape and go on forever.





CULTURE

Farming is the lifeblood of Mixiwilzltan, and fertility its chief concern. The people work hard to maintain the fertility of their land. They cultivate multiple crops on the same plot, so that each crop adds something to the soil that the other crops need. They also farm in cycles, adding new crops and phasing out others over time. At the end of each cycle they burn the plot in order to return nutrients to the soil. The periodic flooding also helps maintain fertility.

In order to keep track of everything, the farmers of Mixiwilzltan have an elaborate classification system for their farm plots. There are high plots (which never flood), low plots (which flood during the Wet Season), and mid plots (which flood but are not completely submerged). There are flat plots and hillside plots of different slopes. There are different types of soil, different amounts of rainfall, and even different amounts and angles of Sunlight, and for each they must also track its individual crop cycle.

Farming is not a simple matter anywhere in the Empire. But in Mixiwilzltan, it has been elevated to an artform. Master farmers from Mixiwilzltan are respected throughout the Empire for their skills and experience.

In addition to physical fertility, the people must maintain spiritual fertility as well. This has lead to one of the most unusual customs of Mixiwilzltan: every adult is required to have a child at least every three years. This demonstration of fertility fortifies the soil and ensures that the people working it are capable of creating and nurturing life. It also guarantees a large labor force for the future.

Once a person is unable or unwilling to bear anymore children, he or she may no longer work as a farmer lest his or her infertility be passed on to the crops. Some move on to another occupation, but many offer themselves as sacrifices (and in some Kalpultin this is actually required). Everybody must contribute, and if you have nothing else to give, you are expected to give your life.

Mixiwilzltan is a place of life and vigor, but this comes at a price. It is also a place of death. Of all the Cities in the Empire, Mixiwilzltan offers the largest number of sacrifices by far. This is necessary to keep the gods of agriculture pleased and the soil fertile across the Empire. But it also gives the city a blood-thirsty and fear-inspiring reputation.

HOW THE PEOPLE OF MIXIWILZTLAN SEE OTHER ALTEPETLS

Xochitlan - Our eldest siblings continue to glorify their one accomplishment long ago. Meanwhile, we accomplish miracles each harvest! They have built a fine city, but there is only so much glory one can claim for being born first...

Teoyezteko - They burn hot and bright, but like a flame they must constantly seek more fuel. And we control their fuel. They are a tragic parody of nobility; they have everything except what they need.

Ilwikakalko - The wind goes where they tell it to go, but only because it, like all the rest of us, is sick of their nagging! They threaten to withhold the rain from those who don't applaud their songs, but we don't worry--they all come down to Mixiwilzltan to buy their food.

Popokatetlan - If anyone treated them the way they treat everyone else, they would be reduced to starving beggars in a year! They would do well to remember that we can go without fresh arrowheads for much longer than they can go without maize.

Tlatlahako - Their sages are a great help in watching the signs, their oktli brings joy to the people, and their goods are most useful. Of course, their city is a hive of beggars, vagabonds, and squalor. But so long as they bring their goods to us, we can avoid setting foot in that depressing place.

PROMINENT LANDMARK

The pyramid of Elopatilztlitli at the center of Mixiwilzltan is the biggest in the Empire, aside from the one at Tleteoxiwakan. It is not as tall as the pyramid of Weystlalin in Xochitlan, but it is much broader and encompasses a much greater volume. Its stair case faces south and is perpetually slicked with blood from the many sacrifices.

All pyramids have burial chambers and passages inside, but the pyramid of Elopatilztlitli is uniquely extensive because it is so ancient. Every Tlatoani who has ruled since the lighting of the New Fire is entombed in the upper chambers. Beneath those are the chambers of the Kakayawani, where few dare to tread. And beneath those are ruins dating back to the Ancestral Tonalteka. Supposedly, the house of First Man and First Woman is somewhere beneath the pyramid of Elopatilztlitli.

The few Priests who have explored the interior speak of a strange inner world that does not correspond to the outside at all. They report impossibly long tunnels, impossibly deep shafts, and signs of recent changes that cannot be explained. One Priest ventured into the depths and vanished without a trace. She emerged seven years later, emaciated and completely insane. Others have yet to reappear and are presumed lost.

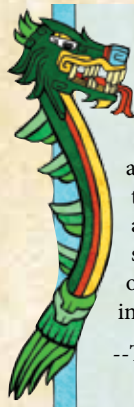
NOTABLE FESTIVAL

THOUGHTS ABOUT MIXIWILZTLAN

"Never forget the great truth we learned in the jungles during our Time of Wandering: a garden is more than the crops you see in the field. It is the bees that kiss its flowers, the worms that massage its roots, the rain that slakes its thirst. It is also the plants that grew there before, whose life energies remain in the soil to be reborn in new forms. It is the family who cares for it, and their ancestors who cared for and shaped it long ago. Remember: the forest is a garden. And somebody planted it."

--Kozamalotl (Rainbow), Corn Priestess of Mixiwilzltan





THOUGHTS ABOUT MIXIWILIZTLAN

"Nowhere in the world are there people more dedicated to their work than in Mixiwiliztlan. There are many outside the city who dislike their aggression and the zeal with which their Priests offer sacrifices, and whisper that it must be Tonalteka oppression. But the backbreaking hard work, the meticulous preparation and shaping of the landscape, and the legions of willing sacrifices--these are not the result of coercion. The people of Mixiwiliztlan really are incredibly, _terrifyingly_ willing to fulfill these duties and then some."

--Tlachinoli (Fire), Pili of Tlatlahako

As one might expect, Mixiwiliztlan is home to many agricultural festivals. The most celebrated of these is the Planting of Maize Festival, held each year at the beginning of the planting season once the Priests determine that the signs are right to begin.

The ritual begins atop the Temple of Elopatiliztli. A young woman who just recently started menstruating is selected to embody Teosinte, goddess of Maize and daughter of Elopatiliztli. She sings a short Flower Song, and then the Priest slits her wrists and throat. She slowly descends the staircase, shedding blood until she collapses and falls the rest of the way, reenacting Teosinte's fall from the sky. So far, no one has ever managed to walk all the way to the bottom of the staircase.

Three women representing maize, beans, and squash (the Three Sister crops, basis of all agriculture in the Empire) pick up her body at the bottom. They carry her body down the main street of the city, singing and dancing as they go, while huge crowds gather on either side of the street. As the procession passes, the crowd hurls small bags full of maize and flower pollen back and forth across the street, covering everyone in the life-giving dust.

They take the sacrifice to a special field that provides food for the Priests of the temple. The Three Sisters carry her body around the field to shower it with her blood. A Priest or a Warrior clad in black vulture feathers, representing Xolokwani the Moon God, then dismembers her with stone knives. The pieces of her body are buried around the field. Finally, the entire assembly weeps hysterically, watering the fields with their tears.

GODS OF MIXIWILIZTLAN

Center	Elopatiliztli, "Healer of Maize," goddess of rain.
East	Teosinte, "Sacred Maize," goddess of maize and agriculture.
West	Sipaktli, "Caiman," goddess of the fertile Earth.
North	Wakikoatl, "Dry Serpent," god of drought and famine.
South	Akoatl, "Water Serpent," god of rivers and flowing water.

NOTABLE KALPULTIN OF MIXIWILIZTLAN

XILOTEKA, THE YOUNG MAIZE PEOPLE

Tekali of Mixiwiliztlan	
Heritage:	Strong Tonalteka, Weak Alka'balum
Size:	Medium (around 100 Households)
Trades:	Land Management, Farming

The Xiloteka are Tonalteka who emerged from the Jungles of the South long ago. They lived in Xochitlan for many years and fought valiantly to drive the Kakayawani from the Valley, but after the invaders were expelled the Xiloteka claimed Mixiwiliztlan as their own. They are by far the most populous of the Tonalteka Tekaltin, but their Southern heritage and customs make them stand out markedly compared to the others, both physically and culturally.

STORIES OF OLD

"Long ago, during the Time of Wandering, our great ancestor Elotzontli (Corn Hair Tassel) led us through a great Jungle. In those days the Jungle was frightening to us. It was dark, because we had no light within us. It was foreign, because we shared no blood with it. It was full of enemies, because we did not know how to recognize friends.

After many months of travel, Elotzontli managed to procure some land from an Alka'balum city whose name has been lost to time. We were very hungry from our travels, so Elotzontli decided to plant some maize to feed us. The Alka'balum tried to show him how, but Elotzontli would not listen.

First, Elotzontli cleared his land to create one huge field. He cut down and uprooted all the trees, slashed all the bushes, and threw them into the Jungle. The Alka'balum told him not to, but Elotzontli would not listen.

Next, Elotzontli planted his maize. The seasons of the forest are different, and he found he was able to grow crop after crop of



THOUGHTS ABOUT MIXIWILIZTLAN

"To farm is to worship, to touch the gods daily, to work with their flesh and nourish with their blood. The Priest who summons a god during a festival is celebrated by crowds and given privilege and prestige. But every farmer who nurtures crops from the soil accomplishes the same thing! Every farmer is a Priest to the gods of rain and agriculture, and practices their miracles every day. Why then must we bow to Priests who summon their miracles only a few times a year?

And why do we trust their judgement more than our own?"

--Kix (Stingray Spine), Leader of the Koamilteka during the great famine of the year 7-Tochtli



maize. Other plants started growing, even though Elotzontli tried to uprooted them all, but he eventually pulled them all out, leaving nothing but maize. The Alka'balum told him not to, but Elotzontli would not listen.

After several crops, however, maize would no longer grow in Elotzontli's field. The soil was spent. It had turned to dead sand. Elotzontli asked the Alka'balum for more land, but they refused. They were very angry, and called Elotzontli a fool. Elotzontli became angry as well, and decided to leave. But the Alka'balum stopped him. They spoke:

'You are maize people, but you know only the stalk, the ear, and the kernel! There is more to maize than that. Maize is the bees that kiss its tassels, the worms that massage its roots, the rain that slakes its thirst. It is the Jungle that grew before, whose life energy remains in the soil to be reborn in new forms. It is the fire that clears it, the plants that grow back after, and the trees and bushes that grow alongside. It is the family who cares for it now, and their ancestors who cared for and shaped it long ago.

The Jungle is maize, and just like maize, the Jungle did not just happen. It was Created.

The stalks you grew were the first stage of the maize cycle, the first words spoken in a long and ancient speech read to us by our ancestors. But you have broken that cycle! You repeat the first word mindlessly over and over! You are only young maize people!'

The Alka'balum continued:

'There is no greater crime than destroying the land as you have done. You must restore it to life. We will show you how, but after maize grows on this land again, you must leave and never return.'

So Elotzontli listened to the Alka'balum. They told him to bring dead brush back from the forest and burn it in the barren field, so he did. They told him to churn the ash into the ground to restore life to the soil, so he did. They told him to take seeds from all the other plants in the forest and drop them into the field, so he did.

For twenty years, Elotzontli followed their instructions, and eventually the forest grew back. There was no sign that Elotzontli had ever been there.

Elotzontli was now an old man, thin and stooped from many years of hunger and toil. He gathered us before him and spoke:

'We have learned much here during our time of debt, but there will always be more. Compared to the Alka'balum, we will always be Young Maize People. Go now, young ones, and find your way home. I will stay here to ensure our debt is paid.'

Elotzontli then took a torch and lit the trees of the field on fire. The fire was smoky and dull, but it soon picked up force and consumed the trees, turning them into life-giving ash while preserving their seeds for the future. Elotzontli walked into the fire and vanished. Days later, a single stalk of maize sprouted up from the newly-burned field, and we were free.

From the blood and ashes of our ancestors, maize grows today. They are the brush that burned to make our fields fertile."

--Kozamalotl (Rainbow), Corn Priestess of Mixiwiliztlan

DESCRIPTION

The Xiloteka are one of the most devoutly religious Kalpultin in the Empire. Nowhere else do Priests command so much influence or Tlatokay concern themselves so deeply with spiritual matters. But at the same time they are also one of the most practical Tekaltin. They spurn many noble trappings and privileges and do not hesitate to get their hands dirty in the fields. Most Tlatokay pride themselves on being powerful enough to avoid field work, but the Xiloteka have little respect for one who has not grown anything. They believe in "practicing what you preach."

In fact, the Xiloteka see little difference between religion and practicality. Knowledge, technology, and religion are intertwined into a single concept. In order for plants to grow, there must be a proper nutrient balance in the soil, and a proper spiritual balance in the field. *But nutrient balance and spiritual balance are the same thing.* By maintaining a proper nutrient balance, the farmer is also maintaining a proper spiritual balance. And the truth is in the growing, an improper balance will not yield crops.

The Xiloteka learned of these ideas during their time in the Jungle. They adapted them from the lowland jungle environment to the highlands of the Valley and made many of their own discoveries. But they always attribute this knowledge to the people and spirits their ancestors met while wandering the Jungle. Despite their expertise, they are always humble and open to new ideas about farming.

The Xiloteka greatly admire the Alka'balum of the Jungle for their agricultural knowledge and skill. They speak their languages, and many take Alka'balum names. However, the Alka'balum do not care much for the Xiloteka in return. They are more willing to listen to them than to other Tonalteka, and some have even confessed respect for individual Xiloteka. But they regard most Xiloteka as violent, bloodthirsty, and misguided.

VIRTUES, VICES, AND WORDS OF THE OLD ONES

Be as merciful as the world allows you to be. This is a hard land we live in. It is difficult for everyone, for those who must die as well as those who must kill. Ultimately, we must fulfill our duties, whatever the cost to ourselves or others. But whenever



fortune allows us to be merciful, to show kindness and compassion and reduce the suffering of others, we must do so.

However, Is it mercy to leave a wounded animal to bleed to death rather than finishing it off? Is it mercy to be lenient towards a criminal, only to allow him to commit a greater crime in the future? Is it mercy to spare someone from the sacrifice stone, only to allow a thousand families to starve when the harvest fails? It is not. It is Squeamishness, the refusal to do what is necessary.

Squeamishness is the mark of a true coward. Life consists of many duties and many burdens. It is unfortunate, but that is simply the way the world works. We have a great task entrusted to us: we provide food for the Empire. In order to fulfill this duty, we must kill. We must inflict pain and sadness upon many. We should be as merciful as we can, but we should also be as cruel as we need to be.

AKAMILTEKA, THE PEOPLE OF THE REED FIELDS

Kalpuli	
Heritage:	Strong Tlalteka
Size:	Large (around 1000 Households)
Trades:	Farming, Arrow-making

The Akamilteka are relatives and rivals of the Amilpixki of Xochitlan. The Akamilteka live on the Lake shores and farm the marshes there, whereas the Amilpixki live on the Lake itself. There are many similarities between these two Kalpultin, but you will have a fight on your hands if you mistake one for the other!

STORIES OF OLD

"We live today on the shores of Lake Ketzalatezkatl, the great Water House, among the fields of endless reeds. But long ago, there was no shore. There was no Lake. And there were no reeds. The land was flat, barren, and dry, and nothing would grow there. Long ago, this land was a battlefield between the twin gods Akoatl (Water Serpent) and Wakikoatl (Dry Serpent).

Every day, the two gods battled over who would rule the land at the foot of Tleteoxiwakan. Akoatl, strong and vigorous, marched in from the south and flooded the land, leaving rivers along his path and pools with each footstep. Wakikoatl, thirsty and desperate, crept in from the north and drank her brother's water, leaving the land parched.

Though Akoatl was strong enough to break mountains with his currents, he would always tire and be driven away. Strength is finite, but there is no limit to greed.

But one day before marching to war, Akoatl noticed some reeds growing near his home to the south. Tall, strong, and supple,

they pierced the ground like arrows from the sky. Determined to gain victory over his brother, Akoatl harvested these reeds and turned them into atlatl darts, then streamed off to war.

When he arrived at the battlefield, Akoatl hurled these reed darts at his sister. They passed clean through and stuck into the ground behind her. Wakikoatl howled in pain as stolen water gushed from her wounds, and fled the land. Akoatl rejoiced in his victory, but he knew that Wakikoatl would return.

So Akoatl dug Lake Ketzalatezkatl, the Water House, a refuge for all the water in the Valley. When Wakikoatl returned, she attacked bitterly, but she could not reach the water housed safely in the Lake. She besieged the Water House for ten long months, and during that time Akoatl grew thin and hungry. But then Akoatl hurled reed darts at his enemy again, and drove her away.

That is how water came to rule the land at the foot of Tleteoxiwakan, and why reeds pierce the shore of Lake Ketzalatezkatl like countless arrows from countless battles. The war of the two siblings continues today. During the Dry Season, Wakikoatl besieges the Lake, drinking all water outside it and starving the waters within. But then Akoatl hurls reed darts to drive her away. Water gushes from Wakikoatl's wounds, replenishing the land and bring the Wet Season.

And that is where we Akamilteka come from. We are arrows shot between gods, fired between seasons, hurled in defense of the Lake. Akoatl's flowing water became our blood. His breath across the openings at the ends of the reeds became our voices. The Sun shining off his shimmering surface became our light.

So long as seasons change, so long as wars are fought, so long as any come to steal from the Lake, there will be Akamilteka."

--Ezkwizaniakatl (Bleeding Reed), Tlamatini of Mixiwiliztlan

DESCRIPTION

The Akamilteka are the most prolific farmers in the Empire. They are the toilers of Mixiwiliztlan, the ones who support its massive population and give it plenty to trade. Their greatest legacy is not stories or sights, but flavors--their varieties of maize are some of the most well-known in the Valley.

They are also known for their high quality arrows and atlatl darts. Akamilteka arrows are legendary for the straightness of their flight and the deadliness of their hits. Many people make arrows and darts out of the abundant reeds that grow around the Lake, but the Akamilteka are uniquely good at it. The reed an Akamilka picks will become a great arrow, both because she knows where the very best reeds grow and also because she imbues it with the power of her ancestors.

Like most of the Lake cultures, hospitality is important to the Akamilteka. However, they also have a fierce territorial streak.





The Akamilteka consider themselves to be the weapons of the Lake, the arrows it shoots at invaders. Others are free to use the Lake and share in its bounty. But the instant they harm its delicate balance or take more than it can comfortably give, the Akamilteka aggressively attack.

As a sign of their devotion, the Akamilteka offer many sacrifices to Mixiwilztlán and zealously bring in additional sacrifices from all over. The Amilpixki tell stories of travelers being warmly welcomed by the Akamilteka and tenderly cared for, only to be dragged out in the middle of the night and joyously sacrificed. The tale is obviously meant to be a jab at their rivals, but many in the Valley hold a similar view. Thus, Akamilteka hospitality is always taken with a grain of salt.

It is difficult to talk about the Akamilteka without mentioning the feud between them and the Amilpixki. They live in close proximity under the watchful eyes of the Tonalteka, so they seldom engage in large scale battles. But they work against each other constantly, and there is almost always a brawl any-time Akamilteka and Amilpixki come together.

The feud has been going on as long as any can remember, and there is no end in sight. Nobody really knows why the feud started in the first place, but by now most of the other Kalpul-tin simply accept the tensions and move on.

VIRTUES, VICES, AND WORDS OF THE OLD ONES

Flexibility is the most important trait an Akamilteka can possess. When the wind blows, it is best to bend like the reeds. The wind will pass them by and spread their seeds to faraway places. By bending, they become part of the wind rather than an obstacle to be broken. But do not mistake flexibility for cowardice. Atlatl darts are made from reeds, and it is their flexibility that allows them to pierce so deeply.

The one thing we will not accept is Laziness. The Akamilteka are farmers and workers. That is our place, and that is our life. Countless others depend on us. If you shirk your work, your family will starve, the Kalpuli will starve, the many who depend upon our surplus will starve, the animals who make their homes among your crops will starve, and ultimately the gods who depend upon the Empire will starve. Laziness is blasphemy. You will work, or you will leave and never come back.

KOAMILTEKA, THE PEOPLE OF THE SERPENT FIELDS

Kalpuli	
Heritage:	Strong Alka'balum, Weak Tlalteka
Size:	Medium (around 100 Households)
Trades:	Boating, Boat-making, Porters

The Koamilteka are people of the Rivers, guardians and guides for those who travel them and wardens against those who would harm or misuse them. They consider all the rivers of the

Valley to be their domain, but the Water Serpent River, largest source of freshwater flowing into the Lake, is the closest to their heart. Its mouth is in Mixiwilztlán, and therefore many Koamilteka have chosen to live there. But their true loyalty is to the rivers, not the city.

STORIES OF OLD

"There was a time when many of the things we know today did not exist, a time before maize grew, a time before arrows flew, a time when all things were new. But there was never a time when the Serpent Field did not sit atop Koaiztlaktlitepetl (Venom Mountain). It is an old place of birth, a mouth of creation, a land where Sipaktli's womb spills forth. It is the source of all rivers. Everything we know came to be in this place.

Long ago, two great serpents were born from the Serpent Field: North Snake and South Snake. They looked upon their world and saw the new sky and new Earth and many creatures unknown to them. The two snakes grew quickly, shedding many skins and gaining many coils. As they grew ever bigger they began to fill the Serpent Field.

North Snake grew the fastest, and as he grew he became very hungry. He looked down into the Valley to the north, and at the bottom, in the very middle of the basin, he saw a turtle lying on its back. As he watched the turtle struggling, venom dripped from his fangs onto pieces of the Mother Vine, which grows on the slopes of the Valley. The vines began to twist and coil, and then they became Siwakoatl, Woman Snakes.

South Snake grew slower and more patiently, and as he grew he became very curious. He looked down into the Jungle to the south, into the dark, dense, and secretive forest, and though he stared into it without blinking he could not pierce the veil of green. As he dreamed about what lay within, venom dripped from his fangs onto pieces of the Father Vine, which grows on the slopes outside the Valley. The vines began to twist and coil, and then they became Okwichkoatl, Man Snakes.

At last, North Snake could bear it no longer. He struck out at the turtle and sank his fangs into its shell. The turtle was wounded, and blood began to well up from the two fang holes. This blood pooled up around the turtle, forming the Lake.

Satisfied with his kill, North Snake tried to pull back, but found that his fangs were stuck in the turtle's shell. No matter how he thrashed and twisted, he could not break loose. Desperate, he called to the Siwakoatl of the Mother Vine and asked them to protect him until he could free himself. Those Siwakoatl became the Northern Koamilteka, residents of the Valley and defenders of the River.

South Snake saw the trouble his brother was in, and told him not to worry. He flowed south into the Jungle to find help. As he went he called to the Okwichkoatl of the Father Vine and asked them to accompany him. Those Okwichkoatl became the Southern Koamilteka, residents of the Jungle and travelers



with the River.

Just like our two great Serpents, our two great rivers, the Koamilteka belong to two worlds: north and south. North Snake has a home but is tied down in the Valley. South Snake is a vagabond but wanders freely.

And just like our rivers, every Koamilteka must choose: protect what is, or seek out what isn't yet."

--Chan Balum (Snake Jaguar), Tlaminini of the Serpent Field

OVERVIEW

The Koamilteka are an unusual Kalpuli. Though many of them live in Mixiwiliztlan and its towns, their true home is not the city. It is the sacred spring atop Koaiztlakltitepetl, the Serpent Field, where the great Water Serpent Rivers begin. This is the location of their Kalpuli temple, the place where they settle official business, and the mythical source of all things the Koamilteka know. Few people actually live there, but the Koamilteka defend it aggressively from any intruders.

This spring is unique because it spawns not one, but two major rivers. One of them flows north into the Valley and into Lake Ketzaltezkatl, while the other flows south into the Jungle and stretches as far as anyone has ever traveled. It is like a double-headed snake, one body with two faces looking into very different worlds. It is also the only water that flows out of the Valley. All other rivers invariably flow into the Lake.

Like their dual rivers, the Koamilteka are people of two worlds: the Valley and the Jungle. Their Kalpuli has members in both worlds, and they travel freely between them. This gives them an unusually broad perspective; they see sights, hear stories, and learn lessons that most people can't even imagine.

Whenever a Koamilteka child is born, his or her umbilical cord is wrapped around a small boat oar and taken to the Serpent Field. This little bundle is then dropped into the very middle of the spring so it can drift either north or south. The direction it travels determines which world the child will be raised in and indicates his or her dominant nature: Siwakoatl if it drifts to the north, Okwichkoatl if it drifts to the south.

People are treated differently depending on their natures. Siwakoatl have more responsibilities and are expected to take leadership roles in the community. Okwichkoatl have fewer responsibilities and less authority. They are encouraged to explore and be creative. Whether one is born Siwakoatl or Okwichkoatl is determined by mystical alignment rather than the physical body. Men and women can be either.

Though only the Water Serpent River flows from the spring directly, the Koamilteka believe it to be the spiritual source of all rivers, and therefore consider all rivers their domain. Consequently you can find Koamilteka all over the Empire, working as boatmen to carry people and goods down the rivers to

the Lake. They make the very best boats in the Empire, and are famous for their ability to navigate even the deadliest waters with ease.

Because their people are so spread out, the Koamilteka do not attach much importance to Households or immediate relatives. Instead, everyone in the Kalpuli is related, and any fellow Koamilteka must be treated as family. Many Koamilteka children are raised not by their parents, but by more distant relatives, or even by strangers. Okwichkoatl children especially are allowed and even encouraged to drift from village to village, confident that they will be cared for in each.

As you might expect, this lifestyle gives the Koamilteka a strong individualistic streak, especially the Okwichkoatl. They are loyal to their Kalpuli but not dependent on it. Likewise, they may be loyal to other Altepetls but never dependent on them. There is an idea among the Koamilteka of 'Following the River'--you may go anywhere the River leads, but you must never leave it. The River in this case refers to the person's own path in life, their own destiny and convictions and judgement.

Because of this, the Koamilteka are among the most rebellious of all Kalpultin. They work to strengthen their power and that of their fellow Tlalteka people while diminishing the influence of the Tonalteka. They seldom lead armed uprisings; they prefer to make their case with words. There is a quiet confidence about them, for they know they can withdraw from the Valley if they choose. And because their boatmen are so important to trade, the threat of withdrawal gives them substantial clout.

VIRTUES, VICES, AND WORDS OF THE OLD ONES

Home is where the river splits, and that is always where you will return, either in this life or the next. But you cannot truly learn about your home until you leave it and see what it is not.

The world is full of people who seek to lay their troubles upon you, who will try to make you believe in their views, their ideas, their goals. But so long as you call yourself Koamilteka, ours is the cause that lives within you. You may go anywhere the River takes you, and take those you wish along with you. But the moment you leave the River and follow another's path, you cease to be Koamilteka.

TEOYEZTEKO, LAND OF THE GODS' BLOOD

"After driving the Kakayawani from the Valley, the Tonalteka and their allies gathered at the old city on the shore. In the zeal of victory they destroyed many things. They tore down the Kakayawani houses, demolished their palaces, and burned their Tlatoani's headdress, so no ruler would ever be tainted by such cruelty again. Finally, they took the idols of the Kakayawani gods down from the temples and hurled them into a great bonfire in the center of the city.

But the idols did not burn. Instead, they bled.





OVERVIEW

Teoyezteko is the smallest of the Tonalteka cities. It is located on the northwestern shore of the Lake on the road to the north pass. This places it at the receiving end of most trade from the Desert, and makes it the launch point for campaigns into the Desert, most notably campaigns against the Kakayawani. In many ways Teoyezteko is the embodiment of Tonalteka vengeance against the Kakayawani--it is their old city, the people there compete for the favor of their old gods, and it sends armies against them almost every year.

Like Mixiwilztlán, Teoyezteko is built on the ruins of an old Kakayawani city. However, while old Mixiwilztlán was buried and built over, Teoyezteko was completely demolished and rebuilt from the rubble. The people smashed all the old buildings and used the stones as building material. This gives the structures a strange, mismatched, and vaguely eerie appearance. It is common to see oddly-colored stones with unusual carvings upon them alongside newer stone or adobe.

LAYOUT

Teoyezteko is a gateway to and from the Lake. It is divided down the middle by the Avenue of Flames, a broad road wide enough for twenty men to march abreast with room for cheering crowds on either side. It is paved with remnants of the old Kakayawani buildings, tools, and weapons, and its chief purpose is to allow the army to march through

the city in triumph while symbolically trampling upon the old oppressors. Watching a full army march down the Avenue of Flames is one of the most awe-inspiring sights in the Empire.

It passes through the walled Sacred Precinct of the city and splits around the massive pyramid at the center, which allows soldiers to pay their respects to the Kakayawani gods and seek their blessings for the fight ahead. This is an essential ritual, because it allows the Empire to win the favor of the Kakayawani gods and secure their blessings (or at least avoid their wrath). Before either side sets foot on the battlefield, they each battle in their own temples for the favor of these powerful gods that

Rivers of blood streamed forth from their eyes and mouth. So much blood that the bonfire was extinguished.

The people bowed before this display of power and returned the idols to their temples. They remain there to this day, protected and cared for by the people of Teoyezteko, the place where the gods bled."

--Weykatlachiani (Far-Sighted), Moon Priestess of Teoyezteko



they both worship.

The rest of the city spreads in either direction from this central thoroughfare. Larger buildings cluster near the road and smaller houses meld with the farms at the edges. The fields are concentrated along the lakeshore and on the eastern slopes, while crafting houses are concentrated further inland.

CULTURE

War dominates Teoyezteko. The city is always fighting or preparing to fight. Farmers stockpile supplies for the trail, crafters build weapons to fill the arsenals, Priests scrutinize signs that might point to war, and Tlatokay ceaselessly push for campaigns against those who have not yet joined the Empire. Despite its small size, Teoyezteko has as many if not more professional Warriors than any other city, and a long history of excellence on the battlefield.

Teoyezteko is unique among the Altepetls in that it sees itself as a part of something greater--one of several provinces of the Empire rather than an individual nation. Other Altepetls think of themselves as sovereign entities and see the Empire as a means to their own ends.

Teoyezteka sees itself as the ambition and hunger of the Empire. Its role is to push forward at all times. Xochitlan and Mixiwiliztlan are the voices of reason and restraint, and the people of Teoyezteko have no problem being outvoted, as long as the arguments are fair. But there should always be someone pushing against complacency to prevent the established powers from getting too comfortable. Teoyezteko is happy to fulfill this role.

Teoyezteko also sees itself as a divine protector of the Empire. It keeps the idols of the Kakayawani gods and seeks to steal their favor from and direct their wrath back against the Kakayawani. But these gods are demanding and notoriously difficult to appease. They are the gods of disaster and catastrophe, after all, and looking after them is a heavy burden.

Of course, Teoyezteko is not completely selfless. The city is very dependent on its share of tribute, and in order to grow it must collect more and more. Because there are so many Warriors, Teoyezteko has fewer farmers and crafters than any other city, and therefore it must import far more than it can produce or trade. War can benefit the entire Empire. But it especially benefits Teoyezteko.

The people of the city are unusually willing to travel. They frequently tag along with the army on campaigns, carrying additional supplies, entertaining the troops, and performing services to make the march easier. They also attend festivals in other Altepetls to show support and cultivate a feeling of unity across the Empire. To some this is highly intrusive. But many find such noble attention flattering.

HOW THE PEOPLE OF TEOYEZTEKO SEE OTHER ALTEPETLS

Xochitlan - Their success has made them cowardly. They fear defeat more than they hunger for victory. They are terrified of change and therefore terrified of us because we seek change. Their time will soon pass, and when it does we will be ready!

Mixiwiliztlan - They could be our greatest ally against our oldest sibling, but more often they are part of the problem. Their problem is not fear, but complacency. They are content to tend their fields and offer their sacrifices until the Sun goes dark. Comfort blinds them to the flaws of the world.

Ilwikakalko - Their songs and stories inspire the dreams of the entire Empire, including us. An army cannot fight on an empty stomach, and neither can it fight with an empty heart. One of their stories is worth a hundred tamalis!

Popokatetlan - Their weapons helped us create the great Empire that exists today, but their in-fighting threatens to destroy it! Regardless of their craftsmanship and wealth, we must question the competence of Tlatokay who cannot deal with a few bandits.

Tlatlahako - We would think more of them if their predictions ever *didn't* support what the Xochiteka already wanted to do, but otherwise they have all the virtues one could wish for in a servant. Of course, that inspires more pity than admiration from us.

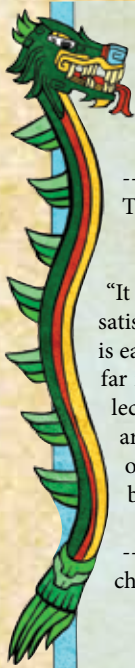
LANDMARK

Teoyezteko is full of notorious buildings. The stories of the bleeding Kakayawani gods fill people with fear and inspire dark stories about what goes on in their temples. As a defense against the menace of these powerful beings, the people of Teoyezteko erected a huge wall around the Sacred Precinct. Many cities have walled Precincts at their centers, but Teoyezteko is the only one where the wall is meant to imprison rather than protect.

It is known by two names: the Wall of Eagles and the Wall of Skulls. The name you use depends on whether you live inside or outside the Precinct. The outside of the wall is decorated with colorful paintings and fine carvings of eagles (messengers of the Sun who watch over the dark gods within). It has many shrines to other gods and to war heroes and ancestors. It also features large shrines to each of the four Warrior Houses, where members pray as they march to war and relatives come to pray for their safe return.

The inside of the wall is covered with countless skulls--stone carvings and actual skulls taken from sacrifices--which act as a mystical barrier that restricts the mischief and malevolence of the gods within. This allows the Moon Priests of the city to deal with them while sparing the rest of the residents from harm. Blood from sacrifices and bloodletting Priests covers the skulls, infusing them with the power to stand strong. This crimson coat must be renewed regularly to ensure it retains its potency.





THOUGHTS ABOUT TEOYEZTEKO

"The Sun shines upon the entire world, not upon individual Altepetls. The devotion of one benefits all, and the devotion of all benefits the one."

--Tonawak (One Who Possesses Light), Eagle Warrior of Teoyezteko

"It is fun to throw tomatoes. They fly with ease, hit with satisfaction, create a glorious mess no matter what, and it is easy to convince people to start throwing them. But it is far more difficult to clean up the mess afterwards, to collect the pulp and skins and lift the stains before the flies arrive. And it is far less fun. Teoyezteko is an entire city of tomato throwers. They have fun and they are popular, but it is all at the expense of others."

--Xiwaketzal (Beautiful Turquoise), Tekutli of the Xochiteka

NOTABLE FESTIVAL

The March to War Festival in Teoyezteko is one of the most beloved in the entire Empire because it is shared among everyone. The army marches down the Avenue of Flame unit by unit, each comprised of troops from a different Kalpuli flying their own banner. On either side of the road, vast crowds cheer and sing. They throw flower petals like confetti, while children run cheering beside the soldiers. Everyone hails the brave Warriors as heroes and saviors.

It takes days for the entire army to move through the city, but the celebration doesn't stop until all the Warriors have been cheered and adored for their service. Often the crowd doesn't even stop then. Large groups of people follow the army beyond the city, sometimes all the way to the battlefield and back, praising them and also keeping them fed, entertained, and in good spirits.

When the war ends, the army returns through Teoyezteko and receives another massive reception. The crowd divides into two groups: the Joyous, who cheer and throw flowers and spread the stories of particularly brave Warriors far and wide; and the Anguished, who weep hysterically to mourn those who did not return.

The festival concludes in the Sacred Precinct. All the weapons that were used are piled up and ritualistically burned as a huge bonfire. These weapons are sacred, anointed in the blood of the gloriously defeated and part of the glorious ritual of war. Burning them repays the gods for their favor and releases their energy for future acts of creation and destruction. Weapon burning also signifies the official end of the war, and the return to normal life and responsibilities.

GODS OF TEOYEZTEKO AND THE KAKAYAWANI

Center	Chokanantzin, "Weeping Mother," goddess of dusk and queen of the Kakayawani gods.
East	Ayotini, "Last Breath," goddess of silence, stillness, and calm.
West	Xolokwani, "Bald One," god of discord and lies.
North	Sesekmikwiztli, "Cold Death," goddess of cold and weakness.
South	Wakikoatl, "Dry Serpent," goddess of drought, famine, and deprivation.

NOTABLE KALPULTIN

TEOYEZTEKA, PEOPLE OF THE BLEEDING GODS

Tekali of Teoyezteko	
Heritage:	Strong Tonalteka, Weak Kakayawani
Size:	Small (around 10 Households)
Trades:	Land Management, Warfare

The Teoyezteka are the youngest and smallest of the Tonalteka Tekaltin, though their influence has quickly risen to rival that of the other two. They are notoriously ambitious and fanatically loyal to the Empire, but they are still consumed with vengeance towards the Kakayawani, their former oppressors.

STORIES OF OLD

"Unlike most others, our story does not begin 'long ago.' We were born in a time recorded in the codices and remembered by generations not long dead. And yet we struggle more with uncertainty about our origins than any other Kalpuli.

You will find, young ones, that the recent past is often more mysterious than the distant past. The paint is dry on the ancient codices. Lies and truths look the same, and all the doubt died with those old writers. But the paint is still wet in the newer codices, because they are still being made.

And we can still sense the doubts.

What we know is that not long ago, we were many people from many places. But then our great ancestor Tlepapalotl (Fire Moth) was born. We do not know where he was born, or to which Kalpuli. But we do know that he was a great Warrior and a great leader, and he had the happy fortune of being born in a time of great opportunity.

In those days the Kakayawani ruled the Valley, and the Tonalteka were their serfs. When the People of Light rose up against their oppressors, they summoned all the people of the Valley to their cause. Tlepapalotl responded, and led many men to greatness in the war that followed.



During the war, Tlepapalotl killed many Kakayawani, and also lost many of his men to them. He grew to hate them. But hate can be a very intimate thing. Our mothers endure great pain and hardship to bear us into this world. They shed much blood, and they witness our first breaths. Enemies in war endure great pain. They shed much blood. And they witness our last breaths.

The difference between love and hate, between enemy and creator, is not as large as you might think.

After the Kakayawani were driven from the Valley, Tlepapalotl returned to the old city that stood where Teoyezteko stands today. It had a name, but that name is forgotten. Tlepapalotl erased it from the world, because he destroyed that city.

But when he tried to destroy the gods of that city, they would not die. Instead, they bled.

Tlepapalotl understood this, even when all others were terrified. He approached these gods, knelt down, and merged their blood with his own. Therefore, they became our gods, not their gods. Therefore, the Kakayawani ceased to be separate from us. Tlepapalotl and all who descend from him became one with the enemy. The war is no longer beyond.

It is within us.

Our mothers separated from us to give us life. We start as one with them, and become two. Today there are two great powers: Empire and Kakayawani. To destroy our enemies, we must conquer them as we conquer the conflicts within ourselves. We must become one with them.

Our enemies bled, and we were born. Then our gods bled, and we were Tonalteka. Whatever we were before is not important. Today we are Tonalteka. We are Teoyezteka. And we will see our enemies die as they become part of us."

--Tonawak (One Who Possesses Light), Eagle Warrior of Teoyezteko



THOUGHTS ABOUT TEOYEZTEKO

"There is no place more welcoming than Teoyezteko in all the Empire! The people are kind and generous. They are quick to offer help and see to it that no visitors are left without accommodations. In their eyes, we are all brothers and sisters. They make the Empire a place worth fighting for! I would march for a year and fight any enemy, so long as that march began on the Avenue of Flames in Teoyezteko."

--Kochnenkwi (Sleepwalker), Jaguar Warrior of Tlatlahako

OVERVIEW

The Teoyezteka are the most aggressive and expansionist of the Tonalteka. They constantly strive to continue the long conflict against the Kakayawani and bring new cities into the Empire. They frequently send scouting expeditions to search for new people and places. They are the ambition of the Empire. They are its hunger.

It is impossible to understand the Teoyezteka without understanding their intense hatred of the Kakayawani. It is more than an obsession--it is a pillar of their identity. The Teoyezteka did not become a unified Kalpuli until after the Kakayawani were defeated, when their great ancestor Tlepapalotl anointed himself with the gods' blood and claimed the city for his own.

There are three different versions of this story. One claims that Tlepapalotl was a Pili of the Xochiteka who claimed the old city after the war in order to watch over the Kakayawani gods. The other Tekaltin acknowledged his claim, and that was that.

Others maintain that Tlepapalotl was a Masewal--either a Tlatteka or Tzatzini--who *became* a Tonalteka following the war. By anointing himself with the blood of the idols, he acquired divine blood and thus Tonalteka status.

Still others claim that Tlepapalotl was actually a Kakayawani defector who allied with the Tonalteka, and that the Teoyezteka are not actually Tonalteka at all because they have the blood of the enemy within them. Though there is little evidence, some maintain that, by anointing himself with the blood of the enemy gods, the Teoyezteka actually share more with the Kakayawani than with the Tonalteka, whose blood comes from the Sun Gods of Tlete-oxiwakan.

Even the Teoyezteka are divided on which version is the truth. They rebuke any who accuse them of being Kakayawani, but many of their stories at least explore this idea. The other Tonalteka Tekaltin prefer the first version (where Tlepapalotl was already a Tonalteka) because it reinforces the social order that the Empire depends on.

But the other version (where Tlepapalotl became noble through his actions) inspires rebels today with the idea that nobility can be claimed and taken. The Teoyezteka who believe so strongly in the greater cause of the Empire might very well be the story that causes its collapse.

Following in the tradition of their great Warrior ancestor, the Teoyezteka are some of the most distinguished Warriors in the Empire. Their Tlatokay are all Warriors or have at least some military role. The Teoyezteka have little respect for a Tlatokay who is not also a Warrior or a Priest. This often offends the Tlatokay of Xochitlan and Mixiwiliztlan, who believe that nobility is more than physical might. Of course, the Teoyezteka would reply that it takes more than physical might to be a Warrior.



The Allied and Tributary Cities generally admire the Teoyezteka. War is one of the best and most respected ways to gain prestige and climb the social pyramid. The Teoyezteka achieve glory through war and offer others the same opportunity. They still carry the perceived arrogance and thirst for power typical of all Tonalteka, but at least they seem to direct their aggression outwards, beyond the Empire.

The other Tonalteka Tekaltin respect the Teoyezteka for their dedication to the Empire, but their constant belligerence and obsession with vengeance causes many arguments. Their concerns also have a spiritual dimension. The Teoyezteka take care of the Kakayawani idols and ensure that the Empire benefits from their favor and avoids their wrath. But what if the Kakayawani gods manage to corrupt the Teoyezteka? What if they turn them from wardens into puppets?

What if they are really trying to get home?

VIRTUES, VICES, AND WORDS OF THE OLD ONES

Always be ready to fight. Contrary to popular belief, most wars begin not because someone is over-prepared, but rather under-prepared. Strength diffuses violence, forcing people to resolve issues in other ways because the cost of fighting is too great. But Weakness *invites* violence. If you are weak, peace only means that someone strong has not yet decided to crush you. If you are strong, peace is a choice--you may choose to shelter the weak, or conquer them. It is always better to be strong, to be prepared.

But you must not be hotheaded. War is only glorious when it serves the gods, not your own temper. When you are prepared you may fight with all your heart and show no mercy until the enemy surrenders. But you must not allow him to trick you into fighting unprepared! We do not criticize those who say 'wait' as long as they use the delay to prepare. We only criticize those who say 'wait' and then go back to their complacent lives.

THE ALLIED CITIES

Beneath the Ruling Cities are the three Allied Cities: Ilwikakalko, Popokatetlan, and Tlatlahako.

The Allied Cities occupy a middle ground in the Empire. They are junior partners, the descendants of the Tlalteka who sided with the Tonalteka against the Kakayawani. They are subordinate to and pay tribute to the Ruling Cities, but otherwise they are permitted to run their domains as they see fit. They collect tribute from other cities, wage their own wars, and build their own temples.

The Allied Cities have limited say in the political decisions of the Empire. Their Tlatokay cannot become Wey Tlatoani or Tonalsiwatl, but they can vote for Tonalteka candidates and share their opinions on Imperial policy.

Officially, the Ruling Cities can overrule any or all of the Allied Cities, but in practice they rarely do so. This is because the Allied Cities are dangerous. Individually, they are smaller and weaker than the Ruling Cities, but together they have greater numbers. Furthermore, many residents of the Ruling Cities are of Tlalteka heritage and would side with the Allied Cities in a struggle.

The Tonalteka seek to keep their allies happy, but also divided and intimidated. Therefore, they require them to compete with one another in Flower Wars. These arranged ritual conflicts allow cities within the Empire to fight without risking land or incurring the tremendous cost of a full on war. The Allied Cities must periodically participate in Flower Wars against each other, against the Tributary Cities, and also against the Ruling Cities.

There are also important religious reasons for Flower Wars, and these must not be underestimated. But they are also very useful as a means of intimidation, because the Ruling Cities never lose.

Despite this, there is a certain amount of rebelliousness among the Allied Cities. It waxes and wanes with the times, rising when times are bad and falling when they are good, but it is always there. It is rarely spoken of outwardly, for the Tonalteka have many means of control, both subtle and overt. But someone is always scheming and watching the Tonalteka for signs of weakness and opportunities to take advantage of such weakness.

ILWIKAKALKO, HOUSE OF THE SKY

"Every day, every story, and every song begins in Ilwikakalko."

--Teoxiwitl (Precious Turquoise), Singing Priestess of Ilwikakalko

OVERVIEW

Ilwikakalko is a small city perched on a high saddle between the great peaks Tlatekwintepetl (Thunder Mountain), and Kwiawitpetl (Rain Mountain) in the Kochewa Mountain range. Thin, treacherous rock staircases cut into the mountains allow travelers to make the grueling climb to the city. It is one of the most defensible positions known; neither the Kakayawani nor the Empire ever managed to conquer it. It joined the Empire willingly to benefit from trade and sees its tribute as a service fee rather than protection money.

Ilwikakalko is home to one of the greatest views in the entire Empire. There is not a city, town, or mountain that is not visible from Ilwikakalko on a clear day. To the west lies the Valley, stretched out in all its glory. To the east lies the sandy lowlands of the Eastern Crescent, and far off in the distance the great ocean is visible as a thin shimmering band gleaming on the horizon. Though Ilwikakalko is home to humans, those who live there see the world as the eagles see it.



The weather in Ilwikakalko is extreme and changes drastically throughout the day. The air is very thin, so it is quite cool, but the Sun is strong and intense, and rapidly burns even seasoned outdoorsmen to a crisp. Rain showers and storms appear out of nowhere from the east, forming rapidly as moisture from the ocean climbs up the mountains and turns into thick clouds. It also gets very cold during the Dry Season, to the point where snow is common.

LAYOUT

The city is little more than a Sacred Precinct surrounded by a few Kalpuli temples inhabited mostly by Priests. The majority of the Altepetl's population is spread throughout the mountains among numerous towns and villages, some of which are located clear across the Valley. Membership is determined not by horizontal distance but rather by altitude--all mountaintop towns pay tribute to and consider themselves part of Ilwikakalko.

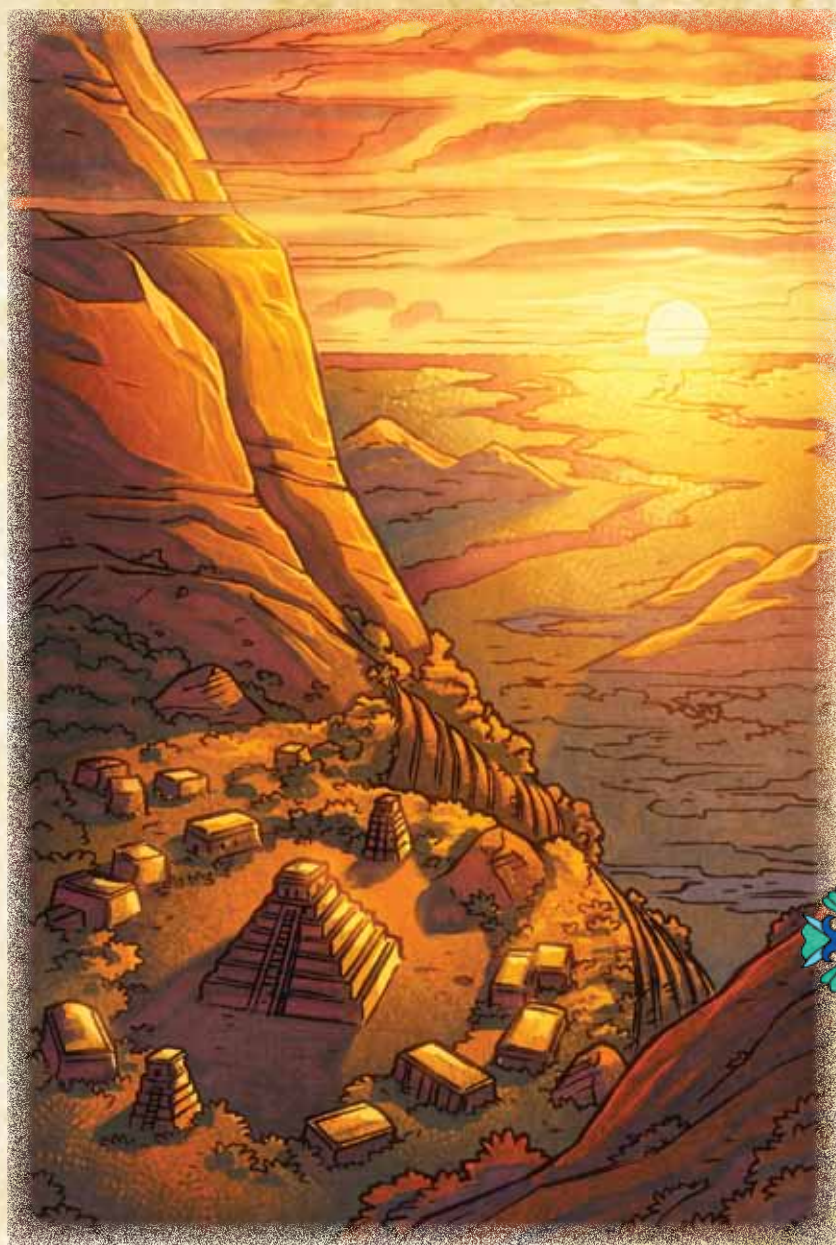
Climbing the mountains is extremely difficult, but it is easy to get around once you are up there. Thin paths wind up, down, and around the mountain peaks, carved into the steep slopes and cliffs. These paths connect the far-flung mountain villages and permit travel all around the rim of the Valley.

The people of the high mountains employ some unique farming methods suited to their extreme environment, and these methods have shaped the landscape significantly. Huge terraced fields cover the eastern mountainsides like staircases for giants, facing the sun and collecting the majority of incoming rain. This creates sufficient flat space for growing, combats soil erosion on the slopes, and also makes it much safer for the farmers. Ilwikakalko is a city of a thousand step pyramids carved from the mountains.

CULTURE

Ilwikakalko is a holy city to the people of the mountains, a sacred center of their culture. Those in the city refer to themselves as the Greeters of the Dawn and the Singers of the Wind, because they are the first ones to see each sunrise and feel each gust of wind as it blows into the Valley. It is the symbolic birthplace of these things, the place where they enter the world of the Valley.

Ilwikakalko is an isolated place, detached from the rest of the world and almost more heavenly than earthly. The Earth stretches far below, peaceful but distant, while clouds and Sun

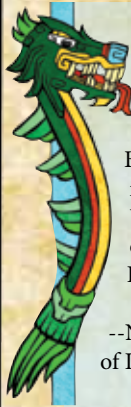


and eagles float nearby, almost at the same height as the city. Those who live there feel closer to these denizens of the Skies than those of the Earth below.

Religion unites the people of Ilwikakalko and gives the city its influence. The people of the mountains all work hard to provide for the Priests and elders at the Kalpuli temples, and as long as they maintain the temples and offer spiritual aid to all who ask, the tribute they receives is all given willingly. In many ways, Ilwikakalko is the reverse of most Altepetl--the urban center is actually subordinate to the surrounding villages.

The city is not without the ability to threaten, of course. The Singing Priests who live there are said to talk to the wind and advise it about which course to take, which allows them to control the weather for the rest of the Valley. There are many who scoff at this and dismiss it as offensive arrogance. But few are





THOUGHTS ABOUT ILWIKAKALKO

"Everything is clear from a distance. Clouds have definite shapes when they are far away and approaching. But as they approach, they lose that shape and becomes indistinct mist. Clouds only have edges at a distance. Up close they are murky and obscure. Seeing one at a distance does not tell you what it is like to live within it. Ilwikakalko sees the world from a distance."

--Nochewatl (Consistent), Farmer of the Iztakteko Village of Ilwikakalko

willing to risk offending the Singing Priests unnecessarily.

City life is pleasant. There is splendor all around to admire and contemplate. Food is constantly brought in, so there is no need to work too hard. The people are free to focus on the finer things. Ilwikakalko is well known for its feather work and weaving, but it is most famous for its great stories. The stunning views, contact with interesting travelers from the coast, and closeness to the gods--it all combines to make the people some of the most inspired storytellers in Semanawak.

Life for mountain villagers is considerably more difficult. The land is unforgiving and the growing season is short, and access to trade can be infrequent at best. It can also be a somewhat lonely life, since villages are few and far between and tend to have fairly small populations. But despite the hardship the people cling as tenaciously to their Altepetl as they do to the mountain slopes.

Ilwikakalko relies far less on maize than most other Altepetls. The people have mastered several high-altitude, frost resistant varieties of maize, but the soil cannot support high enough yields. Instead, crops like potatoes, which are far more resistant to cold, make up the center of their diet. Potatoes are dried and ground up into a sort of flour, which can be worked into a variety of forms. This gives the cuisine of Ilwikakalko a distinctively different set of flavors.

HOW THE PEOPLE OF ILWIKAKALKO SEE OTHER ALTEPETL

Xochitlan - If all our dreams came true, our city would be like Xochitlan. It possesses all the beauty we crave and all the power we lack.

Mixiwiliztlan - There is wisdom in simple work. At least that is what they say. But though the fields of Mixiwiliztlan yield many ears of maize, they only end up with a few kernels of insight. And an entire ocean of blood.

Teoyezteko - We are relieved that they like our stories, for they would make terrifying enemies. They worship gods of disaster and field armies of great Warriors, Who in their right mind would oppose them?

Popokatetlan - Somewhere under all those scraps of lumber, all those piles of stone flakes, and all those bags of cocoa beans, there must be some tiny shard of sentiment and wonder at the world around us, some moment of happiness that it has brought them. But we are still waiting to see it.

Tlatlahako - Anything sounds profound when you are drunk.

LANDMARKS

There are two tall, thin mountain peaks that rise on either side of Ilwikakalko like arms stretched towards the sky: Tlatekwintepetl (Thunder Mountain) to the north, and Kwiawitpetl (Rain Mountain) to the south. They are gateways, watchtowers, and home to the gods who govern the different types of weather.

Rain blows in from the warm and steamy forests to the south and southeast, and therefore Kwiawitpetl is known to be the home of Elopataliztli the Rain Goddess. Thunderstorms come in from the rough and violent lands to the north, making Tlatekwintepetl the home of Tlatekwintewetl, god of storms. Temples to the respective gods are located at the very top of each.

These temples are cold and remote, and the climb to get there is extremely difficult, but while most temples are seen as homes for the gods on Earth, the twin temples of Ilwikakalko are mansions for the gods in their native land--the Sky. Because of this closeness, idols and relics from these two temples are among the most powerful and revered in the Valley.

NOTABLE FESTIVAL

The Welcoming of the Rain festival in Ilwikakalko is a time of great excitement, but it inspires more awe than joy. It is performed at the very beginning of the Wet Season, the arrival of which is very obvious--you can literally see it moving across the land, rising up from the south each day like a solid curtain. As soon as this curtain is visible, preparations for the festival begin.

Most clouds come up against the Kochewa Mountains and dump their rain upon the slopes eastern slopes. But when the Wet Season rains arrive there is so much that they continue raining on the other side as well. Floods, mudslides, and intense winds are common, and it often seems as though the Rain Goddess is trying to wash Ilwikakalko off of the moun-

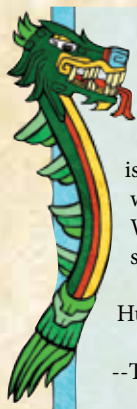


THOUGHTS ABOUT ILWIKAKALKO

"I thought I had lost everything--my house, my family. So I headed east, towards the rising Sun to seek new light and new hope. I vowed that, if I did not find them before reaching the coast, I would walk into the ocean and leave this world behind. But in Ilwikakalko, I gained it all back. On a clear day, there is nothing a person cannot see from up here..."

--Matlaliwitl (Blue-Green Feather), Traveler from Popokatetlan





THOUGHTS ABOUT ILWIKAKALKO

"Clouds are the clay of the wind. They are shaped by its masterful hands into jars that carry the rain. When the rainbearers reach the mountains, they trip and spill their jars, causing the rain to fall on Earth. Earth is the clay of the rain. It is sculpted into beautiful spires, winding canyons, and lush valleys that nourish humans. When humans see beauty, we stop and admire it. We tell stories to explain the beauty.

Humans are the clay of the Earth."

--Tonalnan (Mother of Light), Flower Singer of Ilwikakalko

tain with her tears and grief.

In order to assuage her hysterical sadness, sacrifices assemble at the Temple of Elopatiliztli at the top of Kwiawitepetl. They carry baskets of food on their backs and wear costumes made from maize leaves. As clouds envelope the peak, the sacrifices run to the edge and leap off. They plummet out of sight, bringing Elopatiliztli evidence of the life her tears create.

Sometimes their remains are found on the slopes below. This is an ill omen, for it shows that Elopatiliztli did not accept the sacrifice. But most of the time they vanish into the clouds, never to be seen again. This is a sign that they have left Earth and been accepted in the Sky, and that the rains will soon subside and become nourishing rather than destructive.

Storms accompany the rain. Thunder echoes off the mountain, and lightning violently strikes the ground, a sign that Tlatekwintewetl is jealous of the attention lavished on his sister Elopatiliztli.

In order to appease him, there are also sacrifices on Tlatekwintepetl at Tlatekwintewetl's temple. They wear costumes made of eagle feathers and carry large drums on their backs, which act as containers of thunder similar to the baskets of food the Elopatiliztli's sacrifices carry. They play the drums and sing songs in tribute to Tlatekwintewetl. When lightning strikes, they leap off the peak and vanish into the clouds. They continue to sing all the way down, or up if they are accepted.

GODS OF ILWIKAKALKO

Center	Ehekamitotiani, "Wind Dancer," god of Wind and Eagles.
East	Weystlalin, "Great Star," goddess of the Sun.
West	Sesekmikwiztli, "Cold Death," god of Cold and Weakness.
North	Tlatekwintewetl, "Thunder Drum," god of Storms and Music
South	Elopatiliztli, "Healer of Maize," goddess of Rain.

NOTABLE KALPULTIN

ILWIKAKWIKANI, THE SKY SINGERS

Tekali of Ilwikakalko	
Heritage:	Strong Tlalteka, Weak Tonalteka
Size:	Small (around 10 Households)
Trades:	Land Management, Music, Flower Songs, Storytelling

Of all the Tlalteka Tekaltin in the Allied Cities, the Ilwikakwikani are the most 'pure,' for they almost never marry into Tonalteka families. Ilwikakalko is largely independent and unthreatened, and so they have no need to forge as many ties to the Empire's ruling elite as other Tlalteka Tekaltin. Though this technically makes them less noble, nobody sees them as such--quite the contrary.

The Ilwikakwikani are legendary for their skill with words and their ability to move people. Nobility means many things to many people, but the power of persuasion is one of its universal traits. Noble Tlatokay are admired, attended to, and obeyed whenever they speak. Judged in this way, at least, the nobility of the Ilwikakwikani is absolutely beyond question.

STORIES OF OLD

"The sky is a place of song. The thunder of the clouds, the murmur of the rain, the whistling of the wind, the calls of the eagles--it is all music, streaming from the realms above.

All of these songs are sung to the Earth by the gods and spirits to make the Earth better and wiser. Tlatekwintewetl creates thunder on his drums so that we may know fear. Elopatiliztli's rain murmurs to us so that we may feel calm and soothed. Ehekamitotiani's wind whistles so that we may feel joy. As for our brother eagles, their calls give us bravery and inspire us to fight and work so that, one day, we may join them.

But the sky is not without its own needs. We are children of the gods, and like any parents the gods created us for a reason--for many reasons. Some created us to feed them, so they can attend to other matters. Some created us to fear them, so they can feel mighty and strong. Some created us to amuse them, so there will always be something interesting happening in the world. And some created us to love them.

But the wise old ones tell us of one reason behind all of these, one ultimate reason for why we are here and why our parents sing to us: parents create children so that there is someone to listen to them, someone to teach, someone to give to.

Children were made to learn, because parents and gods were made to share. The thing a parent wants most, more than nourishment, fear, amusement, or love, is to know that her children





have heard her. To know that her children have learned what she has to teach.

That is why there are echoes when the sky sings to the Earth. That is the Earth singing back to the sky. That is us, the Ilwikakwikani--we are the Earth that sings back so that the sky knows we have heard her words and wisdom."

--Teoxiwił (Precious Turquoise), Singing Priestess of Ilwikalko

OVERVIEW

There is no ability more prized by the Ilwikakwikani than the ability to speak. It is the ultimate freedom and the ultimate power. It is also a sacred duty, for the Ilwikakwikani believe that the gods imbue everyone with unique wisdom and insight. This wisdom is necessary for the world to be complete, but it is up to you to discover what this wisdom is and to share it when it is most needed.

Words have a tremendous power. They can start and end wars and determine the fate of countless thousands. They can turn a cruel child into a wise man who serves his community. They can save a genius from despair so she can share her dreams with the world. Like the wind, words move people and things from a distance. Words are the divine power in humans, and the means through which they express that divinity.

As a consequence, the Ilwikakwikani discuss every issue at length, sometimes to the point of absurdity. They insist that everybody have a chance to voice his or her opinion. Even seemingly minor decisions are debated endlessly until everyone is satisfied that everything that could be said about the subject has been said.

There is a popular fable in which an Ilwikakwikani family spends an entire year discussing whether to plant maize or potatoes on a particular field, only to starve to death in the end because they couldn't make a decision. Other Kalpultin tell this tale as a joke, but to the Ilwikakwikani it is a powerful lesson: if the family members were more persuasive speakers, they could have reached a decision in time to survive. The fault lies not in their willingness to keep talking, but rather in their inability to persuade each other. It is better to die than to rush into an unwise decision.

The greatest accomplishments of the Ilwikakwikani are undoubtedly their stories. They are famous the world over as storytellers and poets. In addition, many other peoples have adopted their methods of storytelling--their meters, metaphors, narrative structures, etc. They have created not just great stories, but the medium of storytelling itself. Hence the expression "All stories begin in Ilwikalko."

Though their stories are universally beloved, most other Kalpultin regard the Ilwikakwikani themselves with humorous annoyance or absolute fury, depending on whether or not

they're in a hurry. It is impossible to get straight answers or decisions from the Sky Singers, so people avoid relying on them whenever possible.

This is particularly irritating for the Tonalteka, who regularly call upon the Ilwikakwikani for soldiers. It takes a long time for them to gather supplies and send their troops, which never fails to upset the time table of the war. The Ilwikakwikani are perfectly respectable Warriors ("the greatest way to tell a story is to live it"), but they tend to be rather outspoken, independent, and eager to earn glory rather than serve the greater good of the army.

VIRTUES, VICES, AND WORDS OF THE OLD ONES

Follow your words, for they are gifts from the gods given to you through your own voice. It is amazing how often we do not know our own thoughts until we speak them aloud or hear others speak them. If ever you feel doubt or uncertainty, simply speak with an open heart and ask questions with an open mind. You will find the truth in your words.

But just as we must speak, we must also listen. There is wisdom in everyone, but you will never hear it if you interrupt or silence them. Words are the ultimate power, but you must never fear them, no matter how badly they hurt you. Our friends teach us about our strengths, but we need our enemies teach us about our weaknesses.

MIXMILTEKA, THE PEOPLE OF THE CLOUD FIELDS

Kalpuli	
Heritage:	Strong Tlalteka
Size:	Large (around 1000 Households)
Trade:	Farming

The Mixmilteka are one of the largest groups of farmers in the mountains. Their villages are spread across the jagged rim of the Valley, and thus they are a people of many views and many perspectives. But they are all united in their devotion to Ilwikalko, and to the gods whose mercy allows them to live. They are clever and resourceful, and while they do not produce the sheer quantity of food that the people of the lower Valley produce, their ingenious use of their environment earns them a steady if not completely comfortable living.

ORIGIN MYTH

"First, the fires burned. They seared away everything that grew and scorched everything that ran. But they did not destroy our ancestors. Instead, they shaped them. Oleletletl, the god of Fire, saw that our ancestors endured, and said this:

'You were strong enough to survive my flames, but you must leave, for you will surely die if you stay.'

Next, the mountains rose. They buried everything that sprout-



ed and crushed everything that walked. But they did not destroy our ancestors. Instead, they shaped them. Itztechiwani, the goddess of Earth, saw that our ancestors endured, and said this:

‘You were strong enough to survive my mountains, but you must leave, for you will surely die if you stay.’

Next, the rains fell. They washed away everything that came from seeds and drowned everything that drew breath. But they did not destroy our ancestors. Instead, they shaped them. Elopaticiltli, the goddess of rain, saw that our ancestors endured, and said this:

‘You were strong enough to survive my rains, but you must leave, for you will surely die if you stay.’

Next, the winds blew. They uprooted everything that was planted and blew away everything that flew. But they did not destroy our ancestors. Instead, they shaped them. Ehekamitotiani, the god of wind, saw that our ancestors endured, and said this:

‘You were strong enough to survive my winds. If you were anybody else, I would tell you leave, for any others would surely die if they stayed. But you have endured me and all my brothers and sisters, and you are still alive. This landscape is not just yours. It is You.’

Today, the Sun warms our skin, nourishes our crops as they grow in the terraces, and sustains the animals we hunt. There are fires, mountains, rains, winds, and many enemies besides. But our ancestors left us much strength. They gave us bodies that cannot be tired and wills that cannot be crushed.

We are strong enough to survive anything. Nothing and no one can make us leave.”

--Temixtli (Stone Cloud), Farmer of the Mixmilteka

OVERVIEW

Live is hard for the Mixmilteka. The challenging environment, harsh weather, and perilous cliffs have made them a grim and serious people, but the one thing they will not tolerate is complaints. Mixmilteka are stoic, steadfast people who face challenges with quiet resolve. A thousand storms could not blow them off the mountaintops! What chance does anyone else have?

The best way to describe the Mixmilteka would be “thoughtful but practical.” Their land does not leave them time for frivolity, but neither does it suffer fools to live. Every year requires careful thought and creative planning. The Mixmilteka are always looking for a better way to do something, not to make their lives easier but rather because life in their land is impossible without imagination.

And imagination is certainly something the Mixmilteka pos-

sess. They invented the methods of farming that are used throughout the mountains. They discovered how to carve terraces with simple wooden tools, how to shape the slopes with controlled avalanches, how to use seasonal floods to mine stone, and how to cleave entire cliffs with a few strokes of a hammer. They are a living, thinking force of erosion, and they have shaped the landscape as much as the wind and rain.

Their most thrilling discovery was how to travel from peak to peak. The Mixmilteka string long ropes between peaks and slide across on strong maguey fiber slings. What would be a solid day of hiking becomes a quick, thrilling ride on a zip line. This allows even distant Mixmilteka villages to stay in contact, and turns mountain travel from an exhausting ordeal into a thrilling adventure through the sky!

Although they are practical people, the Mixmilteka are not without a sense of wonder and mysticism. A trip across a zip line is a trip through the Skies and through the divine realms above the Earth. It is a spiritual journey as well as an earthly shortcut. Travelers often pray, offer confession, and ask questions as they slide, knowing that they are surrounded by the gods.

In addition, the clouds that envelope the peaks are believed to be the Skies coming down to touch Earth, transporting spirits to the mortal world and sometimes allowing humans to access the sky. Entire cities of spirits and gods exist atop the clouds, reachable by those brave enough to climb the mountains and leap into them.

The Mixmilteka follow a strict code of self-sufficiency. The community works together closely to support its members, and will care for any who are injured but expected to recover. But they will not permit an invalid to bring down the community. If someone is permanently injured and unable to work, if a child is born with a crippling birth defect of some kind, or if a child's parents die before the child is weaned, they are expelled from the village to meet their end beneath the mighty sky.

This might seem somewhat cruel, but it is not really a matter of choice. It is a matter of survival. The Mixmilteka live constantly on the edge. Surpluses are unheard of. A good year is one in which there is enough food that nobody in the community starves. They simply do not have the resources to spare on members who cannot contribute.

This is why Mixmilteka never die from old age. Those who avoid death by accidents, starvation, and war eventually reach a point where they can no longer work. For some, this is a hard limit; their back gives out or their limbs stop working. For others, it is choice--they are satisfied with their life's labor and wish to rest. In either case, they leave the village before dawn and throw themselves off a cliff.

People spend years deciding which cliff they will use for this





final ritual. It should be a place where something significant happened, where you met your spouse or realized something important in your life. The journey to the cliff is one of thoughtful reflection and pure experience. When you finally reach your destination, you leap from the cliff and become one with the Sky or the Earth.

Other Kalpultin generally look down upon the Mixmilteka. Despite their ingenuity, the Mixmilteka are quite poor. They may have enough to survive, but they seldom have enough to sell. Combined with their no-nonsense attitude about life, this leaves them without much to show for their labor, and so most Kalpultin see them as lowly laborers who work hard their whole lives and die without ever enjoying them.

There is also the perception that the Mixmilteka have been unable to secure any "real" land for themselves, and must instead make do with land nobody else wants. There are many stories in which the Mixmilteka are driven from better land in the Valley by more warlike tribes and banished up into the mountains, and this leads many people to pity them for their sorry fate and for their inability to protect what was theirs.

Nobody knows if such stories are true. If anything happened, it happened long ago, and the details are lost to time. It could just as easily be that somebody noticed the ways things were and created a story that seemed to reasonably explain the situation. But stories always define the reality of Semanawak, and in this case the stories paint a rather dismal picture of the Mixmilteka.

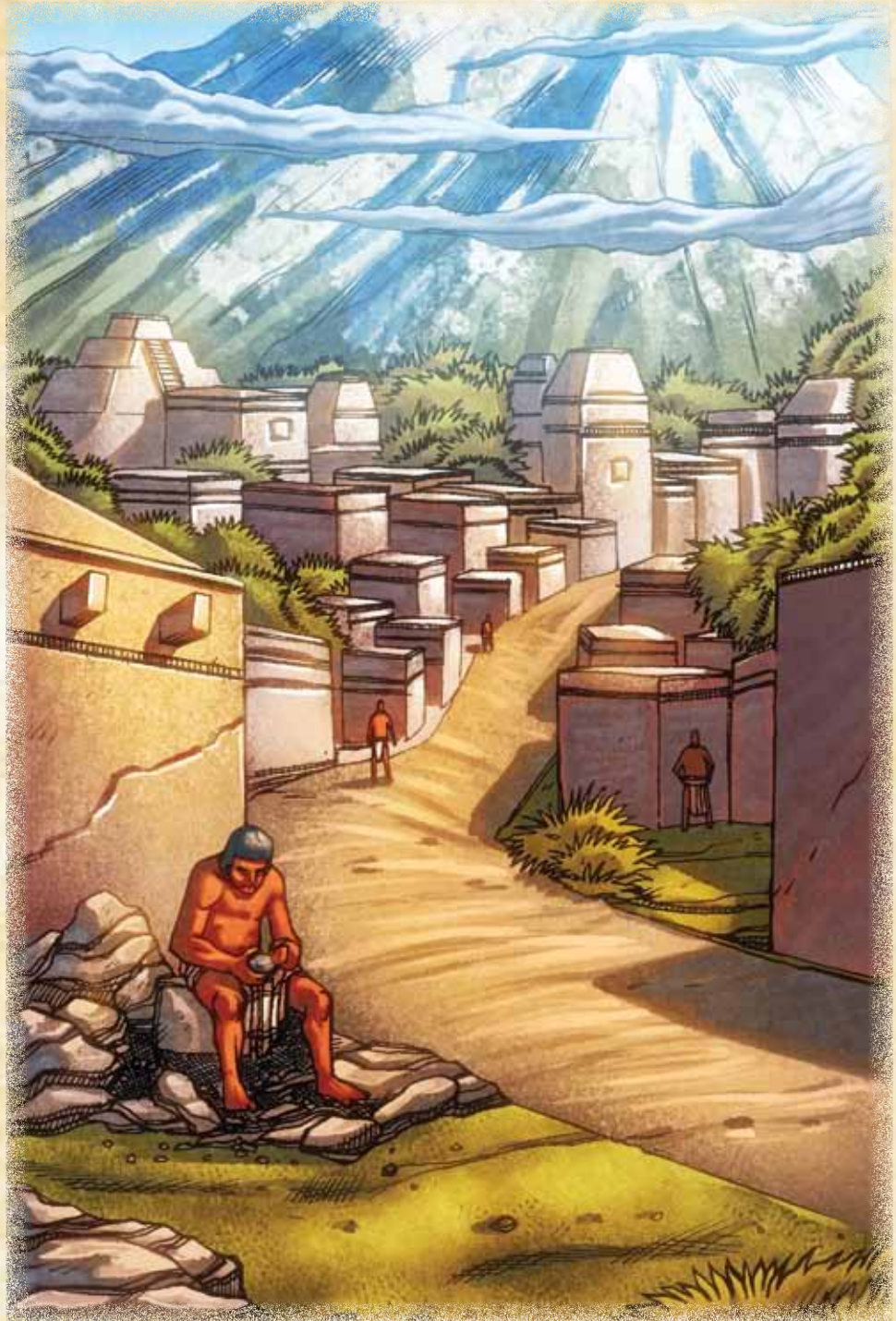
VIRTUES, VICES, AND WORDS OF THE OLD ONES

Accept good and bad fortune with quiet resolve, because ultimately it is your own work that will make the difference. All who live on Earth feel both the warm Sun and the cold snow at some point, but one who is truly skilled can work steadily no matter what the weather brings.

Never succumb to despair. No matter how bleak things look, there is always hope. There is always pos-

sibility. Our ancestors endured hardships beyond imagining, and their strength lives on in you. You are capable of succeeding against all adversity. If you fail, it is because you gave up.

The gods love those who endure, so no matter what storms blow in from the East, you must never give up. You will either survive, or you will die with hope in your heart, and therefore light to guide you through the night of the next world.



POPOKATETLAN, LAND OF THE SMOKING STONE

"Spare us, great Itziwitl, we who kneel at your feet! We are your slaves! Your thunderous voice rumbles beneath us, and we obey its every command! Your smoky breath fills our skies, and we breath you into ourselves and sing your praise!

We are at your mercy, Itziwitl, for if you bleed, we shall die. We will bleed in your stead. Let us bear all your injuries, great god of the smoking mountain! We will bleed in your stead. We must harvest stone from your flesh, but do not bleed, great Itziwitl. Do not feel any pain. We will feel it in your stead."

--Prayer to Itziwitl (Obsidian Feather), god of the volcano

OVERVIEW

Popokatetlan is a large city located on the western side of the Valley at the base of the great Volcano Teminitepetl (Dreaming Mountain). It is a place of great wealth and opportunity, but also constant danger. The violent history of volcanic eruptions is carved into the landscape around Popokatetlan--the creation of new hills from burning lava, the destruction of old ones, and the shrouding of many ages beneath layers and layers of volcanic ash.

The Volcano still rumbles and small eruptions happen every few years, reminding people of the powerful forces and emotions bound up in the great mountain, and of what awaits them if they forget their devotions. However, ever since Popokatetlan and the Temple of Itziwitl were built, there has not been a single massive eruption.

Popokatetlan's crafters are legendary, especially those who create things out of stone and earth. The finest weapons and tools come from Popokatetlan, as well as the finest architects, sculptors, and potters. It is a place of both tradition and innovation. It celebrates its old masters and its new prodigies with equal enthusiasm.

The area around Popokatetlan is heavily forested and hilly. Its hills were formed from old lava flows, so they have abundant basalt, obsidian, and other useful volcanic materials. Further down into the Valley the soil takes on a more sedimentary nature from countless ages of lake flooding and runoff, which leads to bountiful deposits of different but equally useful materials, like flint, chert, and granite. Thousands of laborers make their living quarrying such stones and selling them to the skilled crafters of the city.

The forest also provides much to Popokatetlan. Logging and hunting camps migrate slowly from place to place in search of new trees and fresh game. Kopal incense, an amber-like sap collected from many tree species in the area, is another important product of the forest. Different trees produce different types of kopal, and each village has its own unique fragrance derived from the trees that grow nearby--you can often tell

where somebody comes from simply by the smoky scent that clings to them.

The people of the Altepetl are usually pretty careful about limiting their harvests so as not to deplete their forests, but disputes among the residents over how much is too much, as well as turf skirmishes out among the trees, are very common. The forest is also one of the only areas in the Empire where banditry is still a serious problem. There is a lot to steal, and a lot of opportunities to get away with it.

LAYOUT

The majority of the city is located on a shelf at the foot of the volcano, but its outskirts stretch both further down into the Valley and further up the mountain slopes. Social status improves with elevation. The Tlatokay live in mansions carved into the steep slopes and enjoy luxurious hotsprings. Crafters live in the urban center among the workshops and supply yards. Farmers and quarry workers live down at the bottom.

Most of the farms are located in the low foothills east of town. Rain clouds traveling in from the east come up against the mountains and spill their contents all across the area, which gives Popokatetlan abundant rainfall--sometimes a bit too abundant, in fact. Flooding, mudslides, and avalanches are regular problems during the Wet Season. However, their severity is greatly reduced by the aqueducts and channels created by skilled architects from the city, and also by trees that hold the soil in place.

There is no definite separation between the city and the forests around it. Most of the city is hidden under a dense canopy of leaves and needles. Nobody clears trees from their property. Instead, they encourage them to grow and proliferate. In addition to anchoring the soil, trees provide a variety of useful products: kindling, nuts, nutritious sap, leaves and needles for tea, useful fibers, more.

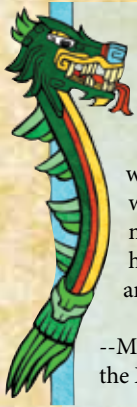
CULTURE

Popokatetlan has an unusual social hierarchy, in that craftsmanship is the basis of nobility. Its Tlatokay are master crafters who rule over trade-based Kalpultin, much like guild masters. Their descendants inherit their holdings, but they are expected to become masters themselves if they want to live as Tlatokay.

These Crafter-Nobles create the finest goods and supervise lower-level crafters, ensuring that their work meets a high standard of quality. They are responsible for teaching the trade and passing down their skills so others can continue their tradition of excellence.

There is a great deal of competition among crafters. Since crafting skill leads to increased social status, many of the tricks and techniques are closely guarded secrets, known or discovered by the Crafter-Nobles and taught to a select few. Crafter-Nobles control who succeeds them by controlling who learns their se-





THOUGHTS ABOUT POPOKATETLAN

"There are few people I respect more than the crafters of Popokatetlan. They are skilled and dedicated to their work, of course, but they also possess a directness that I find very refreshing. They know what they want and are not afraid to ask for it. I also admire their willingness to be hated to get what they want--that, in my mind, is the mark of true nobility. They do not let harsh words or hurtful glances soften their resolve. They are as hard as the stones that make them famous."

--Moyolewani (Enamored One), Elder Tekutli of the Xochiteka

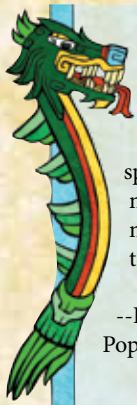
cret techniques.

This secrecy is taken very seriously, and Crafter-Nobles go to great lengths to punish any Freelancers who manage to learn unauthorized trade secrets. At the very least, such Freelancers are banished from that trade and forbidden to practice it ever again. However, it is not at all uncommon for such a person to be killed, either officially or secretly. It is not enough to simply leave Popokatetlan--Freelancers may be pursued to the edge of the Empire if the secrets they know are valuable enough.

The Crafters of Popokatetlan are notoriously picky about the stone they use in their projects. It is not enough that stone be solid and free of imperfections--it must also be obtained justly. Stone may be harvested from the surface, by quarrying, or by collecting it from natural caves and caverns. However, any sort of subsurface mining or tunneling is strictly forbidden. Such methods are a violation of the sanctity of the Earth and an insult to the gods, and are believed to result in destructive earthquakes.

Stone Collectors must cultivate a good reputation with the crafters they supply, who will scrutinize their stones and consult Priests and sages to see if they were justly obtained. Stone Collectors may be tempted to dig too deeply or seek deposits in areas that have already been mined, but their reputations will be ruined if they are caught.

There is a deep divide between the urban and the rural popu-



THOUGHTS ABOUT POPOKATETLAN

"If someone pays you with a smile on their face, you didn't charge them enough. Do not waste your kindness on those who buy what you produce. Instead, spend your time creating great work. Great work inspires need in others, and need sells infinitely more than kindness. Kindness will only get you what people are *willing* to pay. Need will get whatever they are *able* to pay."

--Kakalachtli (Clay Rattle), Crafter-Noble of Popokatetlan, to his apprentice

lations of Popokatetlan. At best they grudgingly tolerate and trade with each other. But often they are openly hostile and occasionally violent towards each other, each dependent on the other but resentful about it. Their hostility stems from Popokatetlan's most notorious Kalpultin: the Kwatike. They loathe city crafters and are loathed just as much in return.

HOW THE PEOPLE OF POPOKATETLAN SEE OTHER ALTEPETL

Xochitlan - Many wonder why the Xochiteka, who have everything, are so terribly unhappy. We understand. They live a life in which everything is done for them. Necessity is the mother of invention, and invention is humanity's divine gift. But there is nothing more they need...

Mixiwiliztlan - They make a great show of how much they suffer for the Empire and how great a burden they bear. But they rest that burden on the backs of many other people dragged to their city to die as sacrifices. We send our fair share of sacrifices--let us get back to work!

Teoyezteko - Countless fortunes have been made from their unquenchable thirst for blood and their constant need for weapons and equipment. We pity those who face them--those weapons truly are the finest in the world!

Ilwikakalko - The Tlamatini tell us that wind can shape stone, but it takes thousands of years. This means that we still have quite a while before Ilwikakalko's words produce a single useful thing.

Tlatlahako - What good is money if it is never spent? What good is knowledge if it is never used? To hoard either makes you nothing but a miser.

LANDMARK

Popokatetlan's Tlatokay live atop the slopes of Teminitetpetl. Their houses are carved into the mountainside. The higher up they live, the greater their status. But the most famous of these mountainside mansions is that of the Tlatoani. It is known as the Temikali, the "House of Dreams," and it is one of the most luxurious homes in the entire Valley.

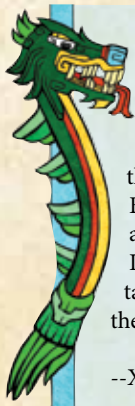
The Temikali was built on artificial ledge carved into a sheer cliff that would scare off even the most skilled rock climbers. There are no paths or ladders of any kind. The only way up and down is a rope lift powered by burly slaves.

Once inside, the Temikali lives up to its name. It is a gigantic mountain spa with natural hot springs and cold pools filled with mountain snow water overlooking the Valley. It has richly furnished and lavishly decorated chambers, and a large staff of cooks, crafters, beauticians, masseuses, courtesans, healers, and various health specialists. It is a place of pleasure and of physical and spiritual improvement.

The Tlatoani of Popokatetlan rules from this heaven and re-



ceives important guests there. Tlatokay from all over the Valley enjoy visiting so much that they offer generous favors just to get an invitation. The Temikali inspires crafters to excel in hopes that they might become Crafter-Nobles, get elected Tlatoani, and one day live there. It is the ultimate reward, a dream for all to work toward.



THOUGHTS ABOUT POPOKATETLAN

"No one accepts more kindness from others than Popokatetlan. They accept the fertile soil we bleed for, the rain that Ilwikakalko sends their way, and the Sun that Xochitlan keeps in the sky. We work hard to provide these things, and without them, Popokatetlan would die. But what kindness do they provide? They won't even sell a tiny flake of obsidian for under a hundred cocoa beans! It takes skill to do what they do, certainly, but farming takes just as much skill, and we don't charge for maize by the kernal...

--Xitomatl (Red Tomato), Farmer of Mixiwiliztlan

NOTABLE FESTIVAL

The Eruption Festival, dedicated to Itziwitl (Obsidian Feather), god of volcanoes and of the contained emotions they represent, is one of the most important of the year, both for Popokatetlan and for the entire Valley. Itziwitl's mountain home looms above, reminding everyone that he could seal Popokatetlan under a wave of molten rock and bury the entire Valley under a deluge of ash. The annual festival is dedicated to keeping the volcano calm.

The festival begins on the first day of the Dry Season, the time of war and violence. A group of Priests bring a sacrifice to the very top of Teminitepetl. They all wear beautiful clothes covered in shards of obsidian. Underneath, they wear a hundred bright red chili peppers that represent the heat and fury within the Earth.

At the top of the volcano, the Priests chant a prayer to Itziwitl. The sacrifice then throws off the obsidian garments and jumps into the volcano, screaming all the way down to the blazing inferno below. Onlookers in the city erupt into an orgy of violence and unbridled emotion. They must bleed and release the emotions that are pent up in the volcano so Itziwitl does not have to erupt. Passionate screaming, shouting, fighting, bloodletting, and lust envelope the city and spark a huge riot.

This festival inevitably results in many serious injuries. It is an opportunity for neighbors to vent their frustrations against each other, and few are willing to pass up the chance to give their rivals a good thrashing. People usually stop short of killing each other, but there are always at least a few deaths in the frenzy and hysteria. Such killings are never punished, however, for it is believed that Itziwitl enters the bodies of the rioters. Those who die are killed by the god, not by the person whose body he was inhabiting at the time.

Shortly after the riot begins, the Priests and Warriors of the city walk through the streets to restore order, wielding clubs with clusters of burning chili peppers on the end. The smoke from these peppers burns terribly, especially when inhaled, and it acts as a sort of tear gas for the riot. They also use them to strike people, causing broken bones and wounds that burn like fire.

The people of the city bitterly resist the Priests and Warriors and attempt to keep the riot going as long as possible in order to ensure that the volcano is properly purged. It usually continues for several days, but sooner or later order is restored and people return to their normal lives. Those who were injured seek medical attention. Those whose property was damaged begin repairs. But all can take heart that the Valley has been spared from destruction for another year.

GODS OF POPOKATETLAN

Center	Itztechiwani, "Obsidian User," Goddess of Earth and Crafts
East	Sipaktli, Goddess of Earthquakes
West	Itziwitl, "Obsidian Feather," God of Volcanoes, Fire, and Emotion
North	Ometochtli, "Two Rabbit," Goddess of Maguey and Alcohol
South	Nakoyomiketl, God of Death

NOTABLE KALPULTIN

TEOSELOTEKA, THE STONE JAGUAR PEOPLE

Tekali of Popokatetlan	
Heritage:	Strong Tlalteka, Weak Tonalteka
Size:	Small (around 10 Households)
Trades:	Land Management, Various Crafts

The Teoseloteka are the Crafter-Nobles of Popokatetlan and the Empire's greatest artisans.

STORIES OF OLD

"Long ago, Itztechiwani, the goddess of crafts, created many forms of Earth, each with a different purpose. Flint was rough and sharp, suitable for blades and arrowheads. Basalt was solid and shapely, good for facades and foundations. Clay was soft and mutable, good for creating pots and vessels. Jade was beautiful and precious, good for making jewelry and sacred masks.

But of all the substances created by Itztechiwani, Obsidian was the most extraordinary.

Created from the burning blood of the Earth, Obsidian was bled upon the land through fuming volcanic wounds as a gift to the people living there. Of all the varieties of stone that exist in our world today, none are as useful as Obsidian. There is





nothing that cannot be made from it--blades, weapons, tools, mirrors, statues, and things we have not yet dreamed of. Contained within this infinitely black stone are all the forms and objects we will ever need.

It is more than rock. It is the stuff of creation itself.

In her infinite wisdom and generosity, Itztechiwani created obsidian and all the other form of Earth so that the people would always have what they needed. Soon the ground was filled with an abundance of these materials, and as humans ventured across the land, Itztechiwani watched with pleasure as they made use of her gifts.

But as time passed the goddess of crafts became very worried. The humans dug huge amounts of stone out of the ground, but they did not use it well. They were wasteful and sloppy in their craftsmanship, using a fist-sized piece of stone to make single blade and throwing the chippings away without a thought.

They were also greedy and intrusive in their stone gathering, and dug deep into the Earth to steal away stones that were intended for other purposes. Some stones were meant to be worked, and were thus placed near the surface for humans to find. But other, deeper stones were meant to support the surface and prevent it from collapsing. Nevertheless, humans took all stones, heedless of their purpose and of the danger their actions posed to the world.



Itztechiwani watched this disrespectful stupidity and became very angry. Humans saw there was plenty, and so they were wasteful. They had no reason to be careful with the Earth.

Because they did not fear it.

So Itztechiwani went into the Earth and pulled forth three balls of obsidian. They were pure and black and infinitely deep, like the night sky without stars. To stare into them was to fall into a bottomless hole. At her command, these balls shifted into the shape of three stone jaguars with pelts black as the darkness beneath the Earth and eyes that gleamed like pieces of turquoise. The goddess then spoke to them:

‘So long as the Earth is safe and there is plenty, humans will be lazy and wasteful. So you will go out into the world and live among them. You will menace those who take from the Earth, make them fear each journey to the quarry, and make them dread each time they must take something more. You will make the Earth dangerous. Only then will they learn how to make the most of what they have. Only then will they become as skillful as I desire.’

Itztechiwani issued a command, and at her word the stone jaguars changed shape again, this time assuming the shape of humans. She then sent them out into the world to do her will.

This is the sacred task we were given, great Teoseloteka. Only those skilled enough to make good use of the treasures of the Earth may touch them. We are living rock given the shape of humans, but our nature is that of the Jaguar. We are predators of stone, and the greedy and inept who intrude into our domain will die.”

--Tototetl (Stone Bird), First Tlatoani of Popokatetlan

OVERVIEW

The Teoseloteka value excellence above all things and believe that fierce competition is the best way to achieve it. A freshly broken stone starts with a sharp edge, but that edge becomes dull over time. It must either be sharpened or replaced.

Membership in the Kalpuli is based on merit. Skilled crafters can petition to be elevated to Tlatokay status and can even challenge existing Tlatokay for position. Such challenges results in craft competitions judged by other Crafter-Nobles. To issue a challenge, the challenger must create something that rivals one of the Crafter-Noble's existing master works, and at least one current Crafter-Noble must claim that the challenger's work is superior.

The competitions are not always completely fair, however. The Crafter-Nobles have a strong bias toward their fellows and consider factors such as political connections and administrative skill as well as craftsmanship. Additionally, Crafter-Nobles choose who gets to learn their trade secrets, and they usually do not pick people who will challenge them. All in all, a successful challenge requires an exceptionally gifted challenger or a particularly inept Crafter-Noble.

Such merit-based promotions have lead to a very unusual ethnic composition for the Tekali. The members are much less likely to be related to each other than in other Tekaltin. It is not blood that unites the Teoseloteka so much as skill level and a thirst for excellence. Teoseloteka are the best--if you're not the best, then you're not Teoseloteka, even if you are the son or daughter of one.

Another effect of this is that Popokatetlan is one of the few places in the Empire where a Masewal may possess some Tonalteka heritage. Like any Tekali, the Teoseloteka intermarry a fair amount with the Tonalteka of the Ruling Cities for prestige and political power. The children of such unions carry Tonalteka blood and thus would be considered Tlatokay anywhere else in the Empire.

But because any Tlatokay in Popokatetlan can be deposed for lack of craft skill, it is very possible for a Tonalteka-blooded child to lose his or her spot to someone more skilled. Naturally, this leads to a good deal of political unrest. Such disgraced Tonalteka often feel entitled to their nobility, and may have enough influence elsewhere in the Empire to cause significant problems.

The skill of the Teoseloteka allows them to wield great influence over trade, and they know it. They have a ruthlessness about them that others often find very off-putting, and they tend to be very condescending towards crafters from any other cities. But





because they produce some of the best work in the Empire, most people tolerate it while grumbling to themselves all the while. “Justifiably Arrogant” is how most people view the Teoseloteka.

The Tonalteka often find the Teoseloteka absolutely infuriating. Despite their best efforts, the Tonalteka have been unable to achieve the level of control they desire over Teoseloteka crafts. Most Tlatokay consider it a favor when a Tonalteka marriage is offered to them, but the Teoseloteka show no such regard. In fact, they often make it seem as though *they* are doing the *Tonalteka* a favor, which many find outrageous.

Despite this, few dare to stand up to the Teoseloteka too forcefully. They control the majority of weapons in the Empire, as well as many other fine tools that are essential for life. For the time being, at least, the Stone Jaguars are firmly entrenched, and continue to make excellent use of their position.

VIRTUES, VICES, AND WORDS OF THE OLD ONES

Excellence is what we demand. Perfection. There are many who say that perfection does not exist, but how would they know? We Teoseloteka have come closer to it than anyone, and if any are in a position to judge, it is us. Perfection is the mountain we spend our lives climbing, and like a mountain, there are many false summits. Many have approached what they thought was the top, only to reach it and find that the mountains continues ever upward. But all mountains have a peak, and we will reach it eventually.

There are many things we will not abide, for excellence permits few defects. But the very worst trait a person can show is Complacency. Let me make this perfectly clear: you are not entitled to anything. Your status, your wealth, your life--these are all contingent on your ability to perform your duties with excellence. If you fail in your duties even once, you do not deserve any of these things. And if we find someone better, we will cast you out without a second's thought.

If you wish to *be* the best, you must *remain* the best.

KWATIKE, THE TALL ONES

Kalpuli	
Heritage:	Strong Tlalteka
Size:	Medium (around 100 Households)
Trades:	Woodcutters, Hunters, Gatherers

Of all the Kalpultin in the Empire, none are as notorious as the Kwatike. They prowl through the forests of the western Valley, preying on the foolish and the unaware and aggressively defending their land from any intruders. They firmly believe that they and all Tlalteka people should live free from Tonalteka rule--or indeed any rule. To them, the Valley is the promised land of the Tlalteka, not the Tonalteka, and membership in their Empire is more of a burden than a blessing.

For now they bide their time, grudgingly paying their tribute to keep the Warriors of the city at bay. But they are always watching for opportunities to achieve greater independence.

STORIES OF OLD

“Long ago, the gods created the world, but they had a problem: There was nothing to hold up the sky and keep it from crushing the world below. So they sent Tlewachtli, the god of running flame, to search for something strong enough to keep the sky from falling.

Tlewachtli discovered many things in his travels, but the flames on his skin burned away everything he touched.

One day, however, Tlewachtli was passing by a field on the slopes of the Choka Mountains, and he heard a strange whispering:

‘We dream of fire.’

He looked around, but nobody was there. As he searched the field, he found a single seed sitting on the ground. He watched it, expecting to see it grow, but this seed could not grow. It was asleep. As it slept it dreamed, and in its dreams it whispered to Tlewachtli:

‘We dream of fire.’

Tlewachtli picked the seed up to examine it, and as he touched it the flames across his skin melted through the layer of sleep around the seed, causing it to awaken and sprout. Before long, it had grown into a tall, strong tree.

The tree grew tall and strong and reached towards the Sun. Soon it was tall enough to hold the weight of the sky upon its branches. The gods celebrated Tlewachtli and his discovery, and turned their attention to other matters in the universe.

Over time, however, the tree's branches broke and twisted and began raining down twigs upon the ground. Its leaves fell off, and occasionally entire limbs broke down. This litter fell to the ground, and began to rot. Rain could not reach the roots--instead, it stuck in the litter and made it rot. Sun could not reach the leaves--instead, it warmed the litter and made it rot.

The tree tried to find Tlewachtli to burn away this litter, but such was the weight that it could not move. It called out to him, but Tlewachtli could not hear it, because the gods can only hear those who dream. So it whispered to its sleeping seeds that had fallen with its branches and that lay trapped among the litter:

“Help me, Dreaming Seeds! Call to Tlewachtli! Dream of fire!”

The sleeping seeds began to whisper in their dreams, and Tlewachtli heard them. But because the seeds were buried beneath the litter, he could not see them. So the seed farthest away from him whispered, and Tlewachtli ran over to where he heard the





whisper. As he did, his flames burned away the litter. Then the seed furthest away from the first seed whispered, causing Tle-wachtli to run over there, and so on.

Soon the entire field was ablaze. The litter burned away and the flames awakened all the dreaming seeds buried beneath. Soon there was an entire forest on the slopes of the Choka Mountains, which grew tall and dropped new dreaming seeds to the ground amidst the litter.

Trees are the pillars of the Sky. It rests atop them, creating the space of the world where humans live. Without these pillars, the Sky would fall and crush everything. It would crush the world, and then it would shatter like a clay pot upon stone.

We are the dreaming seeds of those trees. We watch the litter and listen to those who grow. We protect them from others who dream. And we call out to the gods when the time is right. One day we will all dream of fire, and when it comes, we shall awaken, grow tall, and hold up the sky."

--Zolin (Quail), Kwatike Warlord

OVERVIEW

The essence of the Kwatike is the forest of the Choka Mountains. They are born from the trees, become trees when they die, and see the trees as both ancestors and future. The forest is Time itself; past, present, and future all at once. It is their livelihood and the provider of all things, and a beloved companion with whom they can share themselves. The Kwatike *are* the forest: tall, strong, and eternally drifting between waking and dreaming.

The Kwatike are very particular about which trees may be cut down, and when. Trees that are too young or too old may not be harmed. Some species may only be cut during certain times of the year. But the greatest insult of all is to let cut wood rot. Cutting wood brings it into the dream-life, and dreaming wood must be burned so it can return to the forest as waking ash. While it all makes sense to the Kwatike, these rules can be quite confusing to others.

Consequently, they are extremely protective of the forest. It is their family and their house, and any who set foot among the trees without an invitation are intruders in their eyes. This isolationist streak is behind many of the problems this Kalpuli finds itself involved with.

The Kwatike are fiercely independent, emphasis on the 'fiercely.' They oppose anyone who attempts to gain their tribute or control them, and aggressively drive away or kill any who intrude into their territory. Resistance is their sacred duty, and they refuse to give up their fight for independence. The fact that they survived the rule of the Kakayawani speaks volumes about their resilience and suggests that Tonalteka attempts to tame them are probably futile.

However, it is important not to overestimate their belligerence, either (though many people in the Empire routinely do!). They are not fools, nor are they monsters. They trade with others when it suits them, and they usually talk before attacking. Above all else, the Kwatike simply wish to be left alone. But the Kalpuli is not in open rebellion. At least not all of them...

Certain members of the Kwatike do participate in violent incidents from time to time, rallying behind a charismatic warlord or joining with Tzatzini raiders from the Desert to attack those they perceive as enemies. Some such bands work towards a noble objective, such as opposing an oppressive tribute obligation or driving away those who take too much from the forest. Other bands are simply frustrated and vent their anger indiscriminately. Regardless of their goals, however, most bands are short lived and end with the warlord's death and the brutal punishment of whatever villages spawned them.

The Kwatike trade and interact with outsiders when it suits them. They are extremely skilled at harvesting the bounty of the forest. They are amazing hunters and excellent woodcutters. They always bring the highest quality lumber to trade, and have an uncanny knack for finding the very best kopal.

These valuable goods could make the Kwatike very wealthy, but they are not aggressive traders. They prefer to trade for simple things. They are often a bit naive about the ways of the city, but they recognize their disadvantage and do not respond to the common tactics of salesmanship. They come to market knowing what they want and don't even look at anything else.

As you might guess, the Kwatike have many enemies in the Empire. They are on shaky terms with the other Kalpultin of Popokatetlan, who see the Kwatike as bandits who attack without warning and try to tell everybody else what they can and can't do in the forest. Lumber is one of the city's major trade goods, and so many see Kwatike resistance to increased logging as treason.

The Teoseloteka have an unusual relationship with these most troublesome subjects. On the one hand, the values of the Kwatike are similar to those of the Teoseloteka--protect that which was entrusted to you by the gods. On the other, the Teoseloteka value trade, and resent Kwatike opposition to it. But there is some amount of admiration mixed in, for some Teoseloteka wonder if they have perhaps abandoned their own sacred duty in pursuit of greater wealth. They see the Kwatike living the ideals they can't, and can't help but admire them.

The Tonalteka regard the rebel Kwatike as a threat to their power and the prosperous society they have created. But most of the time they let the Kwatike rage away. Because they are disliked by so many other Tlalteka people, their message of rebellion is often rejected simply because it is coming from them. The Tonalteka defeat rebellion by allowing obnoxious extremists to be the voice of rebellion and letting everyone else fight to silence them.



VIRTUES, VICES, AND WORDS OF THE OLD ONES

There are some things a person should never allow someone else to do for them, some things a people should never accept from another. They may call it kindness, they may call it convenience, but you should learn to see it for what it is: Dependence. The surest way to enslave someone is to offer them something and let them become dependent on you for it. We Kwatike will never be slaves! Always provide your own food, water, and shelter, it is your sacred duty and your sacred right.

Many are the people who have been enslaved by their desire for fancy baubles. They travel to the city and see all the dazzling things to buy and assume that, because something can be bought, it *must* be bought. A jade mask is indeed very pretty, but you will have to cut down 100 trees to afford it. And when the others in your village see your mask, they too will cut down 100 trees to get their own. Soon your forest will be empty, and you will have to sell yourself into slavery to avoid starvation.

All because they were able to convince you that a useless piece of pretty stone was worth 100 trees.

There is only so much a person can ever Need--good food, clean water, shelter, and loving family and friends. But there is no limit to what a person can Want. Want is the sickness of the Empire and of all those who have ruled before them. Do not let it claim you!



TLATLAHAKO, PLACE OF BURNING WATER

"We live in a world of opposites--male and female, night and day, fire and water. But we were born from a great cosmic wholeness. We were born from Teomochi. This is our shared past, and some say also our distant future, and veins of that wholeness still trace across the world. You can find them in the places where opposites converge, and these places are windows to Eternity.

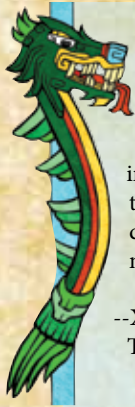
Teomochi lives in the place where water burns."

--Kwikatochtli (Singing Rabbit), Tlamatini of Tlatlahako

OVERVIEW

Tlatlahako is a moderately sized city on the northeastern shore of Lake Ketzalatezkatl. It is located on a large, flat plain of sparse vegetation and small, muddy streams. It seldom rains in Tlatlahako, for it sits in the dry shadow of the Kochewa mountains. From a distance, the city has a brown, muddy look that sets it apart from the bright greens and blues of the other Lake cities.

The buildings of Tlatlahako are short and stubby-looking. Even the temples sprawl more than they tower, which gives the city a very low, uneventful skyline most of the time. However,



THOUGHTS ABOUT TLATLAHAKO

"Every so often I find myself doubting the predictions of Tlatlahako. They bubble forth drunkenly like a spilled pot of beans, dripping on your clothes and ruining your plans. It is easy to become angry and dismiss them as boorish fools. But the last time I did, I lost my daughter to a sickness they cautioned me against. Pride may sting, but it is far less painful than guilt and loss."

--Xiwaketzal (Beautiful Turquoise),
Tekutli of the Xochiteka

for a few brief moments each day Tlatlahako is home to one of the most spectacular sights in the Empire: a spectacular eruption of boiling water and steam spewing forth from the massive geyser in the middle of the Sacred Precinct. The glorious display is visible everywhere in the city.

The geyser is known as Xiwikwiawitl (Comet Rain), and it is the largest one known to the people of the Valley. It is home to Ometochtli, goddess of maguey and alcohol, as well as several other gods and spirits. It is the blessed heart of the city. The central temple was built around it ages ago, and today it erupts through a large hole in the middle of the platform, consecrating it daily with its sacred spray.

Priests meticulously track Xiwikwiawitl's eruptions by counting their heartbeats. (The geyser rains down every 23,000 beats or so). They trade off after each eruption, each Priest taking her turn from lowest to highest rank.

This ensures that the Priests can assemble for, witness, and praise each eruption. They also note any irregularities that require their mystical attention, fluctuations in the geyser's schedule indicate sickness in the Empire.

The intense heat from the boiling water below means that Tlatlahako is noticeably hotter than most other cities in the Valley. Coupled with the dryness of the location, this makes the region around Tlatlahako almost like a small piece of desert intruding into the Valley. The landscape is littered with cacti and other desert plants, which allows for some fairly unique agriculture.

LAYOUT

The geyser, Sacred Precinct, and homes of the Tlatokay are located about a half day's walk east of the Lake and are relatively isolated from the rest of the city. Most of the population lives closer to the shore, where there is more water for growing and more opportunity for trade. The city has two sections: the western lakeshore (inhabited by Masewaltin) and the eastern flatlands (inhabited by Priests and Tlatokay). These distinct sections are separated by sparse fields and a few scattered houses in between.

Farmers grow maguey further from the city, in the arid foot-

hills in the northeastern corner of the Valley where the weather is cooler. This is the region where the sacred, beloved plants flourish. The large fields of thorny maguey give the hills a sage green color and a tangled, twisted texture.

CULTURE

Tlatlahako is in many ways a solid but unremarkable city. It is average sized, produces enough food to support itself, and hascapable but not particularly famous Warriors. Yet it is one of the most illustrious places in the Empire, beloved by countless thousands for one single reason:

Alcohol.

Tlatlahako is the Empire's primary source of oktli alcohol. The maguey farms up in the foothills produce massive amounts of sweet nectar each day, which is brought down the rivers to Tlatlahako to be fermented into oktli in large wooden vats. The most famous and most prolific oktli masters are the Drunken Priests of Tlatlahako, to whom alcohol is a source of divine insight as well as a livelihood. Producing the sacred substance is an important part of their worship.

Traders from all over the Empire crowd the city each day to acquire jugs of oktli. Unlike many forms of alcohol, oktli does not keep very well, so these traders must hurry to buy the freshest batches and get them home quickly to enjoy them before they spoil. There is a sense of eagerness and urgency about the city, but also some very strong emotions (especially when hasty traders trip and drop their jugs!).

The people of Tlatlahako rarely drink just to get drunk, however. Drunkenness is a state of spiritual openness and insight, a way to become receptive to the things in life that often go unnoticed. One who drinks regularly and makes the most of the experience becomes very close with the spirits of the world, able to gain wisdom and perceive problems and opportunities before the "sober sleepers."

Of course, oktli can bring as many problems as benefits. Spiritual openness also invites troublesome spirits into the drinkers, which can cause great harm to them and others. Tlatlahako is a place of great contemplation and insight, but it is also

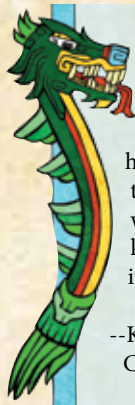


THOUGHTS ABOUT TLATLAHAKO

"I shee shmoke pouring out your mouth. Ah, yer burnin' upinshide! There'sh a fire in yer gutsh and you keep feedin' it with other people! Why you do that? Here, drink summa thish! But it won't help, y'know? You can't fight fire with fire-water! To shtop that fire you hafta to shtop feedin' it. But you won't like it! Before it shtops burnin', it'll burn *you*! But that'sh good, y'see? If it'sh burnin' you, you'll do what you hafta to shtop it!"

--Tleketzal (Beautiful Flame),
Drunken Priestess of Tlatlahako





THOUGHTS ABOUT TLATLAHAKO

"Scarcely a day goes by without the Priests of Tlatlahako slurring out some terrible omen. The Empire is constantly reacting to them, burning these plants here and sacrificing those people there. Is it any wonder, then, that troubles befall us? In trying to avoid danger, we bring it upon ourselves! Many believe that Tlatlahako is blessed with the ability to predict danger. But I say it is cursed with the tendency to cause it!"

--Kakalachtli (Clay Rattle),
Craft-Noble of Popokatetlan

a city filled with drunken beggars unable to work because evil oktli spirits have taken over their bodies. For this reason, some parts of the city can be rather depressing, and others can be quite dangerous.

They are best known for their "Drunken Knowledge," but the people of Tlatlahako value all forms of Knowledge. The city is a haven for sages and tlamatini of all disciplines and a repository for living and written lore in the Empire. It is home to many libraries and scholars, and its stargazers and omen readers are some of the most respected and trusted in the Empire. Its medicine makers are also highly respected. They are familiar with a vast array of plants, both local and exotic, and expert in their use.

Large numbers of foreign Kalpultin congregate in Tlatlahako because its Tekali is quick to grant land to wanderers seeking new homes. These Kalpultin contribute countless new sources of knowledge, but most other cities consider Tlatlahako a slum.

In addition to oktli, Tlatlahako also produces a vast array of goods derived from the maguey plant: clothing, rope, needles, baskets, and so forth. The people practice these crafts with great love, and within the city they are seen as equally prestigious to oktli production (virtually nobody else in the Empire agrees, however). These goods attract many Masewaltin with their low prices and solid construction, but few Tlatokay would stoop to wearing maguey fiber clothing, so it tends not to draw in the big spenders.

HOW THE PEOPLE OF TLATLAHAKO SEE OTHER ALTEPETL

Xochitlan - Our answers never stop frightening them, and yet they continue asking question after question. Happiness and peace are what they seek, but sadly those are the two things that knowledge can never provide.

Mixiwiliztlan - Few understand the cycles of our universe like them, or follow those cycles so devoutly. But we have a question for them: is the purpose of nobility to pass the cruelty of universe on to others, or to shelter them from it?

Teoyezteko - They see knowledge as a weapon, not a guide.

This will be their doom. We have foreseen it.

Ilwikakalko - Can one spread insight without possessing it? They speak without thinking, yet somehow great thoughts come out. They are inept gamblers placing foolish bets—we will accept their treasures, but cannot help feeling sad that they will be left with nothing.

Popokatetlan - It may be that life is without purpose, that we are all just figures in the book of the Giver of Life, pages turning never to be seen again. If that is the case, then perhaps Popokatetlan lives as it should. But what if that is *not* the case?

LANDMARKS

Oktli is the most famous method of seeking Drunken Wisdom in Tlatlahako, but there are many others. One such method is the steam bath, and Tlatlahako is home to the largest steam bath in the Empire. It is built into the plaza of the Sacred Precinct and can accommodate over a hundred people. The Drunken Priests of the city gather each morning to purify themselves for the day ahead, but many others come to the city seeking its healing heat as well.

The temperatures within this house are legendary. Though it is open to all, few can tolerate more than a moment inside. The air seems to scald your lungs, and the thick steam makes you feel as though you are being stewed. But those who can endure the hellish heat witness some of the most vivid, intense fever visions. Masewaltin and Tlatoani alike have found guidance within the clay walls of this building. It has literally changed the course of history in the Empire.

In addition to wisdom and insight, the steam bath is a place of purification. It is a temple to Tlakwepa, goddess of filth and confession, the one who devours dirt and shame and leaves worshippers clean and pure. Sickness and poisons are boiled away while bathers whisper their confessions to ease their secret guilt and pour the troubles that weigh on their mind into the waiting mouth of the goddess.

Though it is a place of life, there are also a few sacrifices made here by the devoted looking to become one with the visions or atone for some particularly shameful, dirty offense. They lock themselves inside the steam bath and sweat to death, achieving a fatal state of purity in the holy heat. Afterwards, the door is thrown open to allow a plume of steam to escape and carry the energy of the dead out into the world.

NOTABLE FESTIVAL

The geyser Xiwikiawitl is the site of many rituals, but one of the most well-known is the Burning Water Leap, an initiation ceremony for aspiring Warriors or Priests and Masewaltin who want to become Tlatokay. Even the Tlatoani of Tlatlahako must undergo this ritual in order to take office.

The procedure is simple; applicants leap over the geyser from





the east side to the west. Jumping across the wide mouth of the geyser requires considerable athleticism. Falling in means instant death. Most are lucky to catch the far edge and pull themselves up, but a talented few manage a clean leap across. Those who make it all the way and land on their feet enjoy a high level of prestige, so Tlatlahako Warriors practice jumping and strengthen their legs in preparation.

The timing of the leap is critical, applicants must make their leap at a within a hundred beats of an eruption. The Priests' heartbeat counting method is not precise, so there is real danger that the geyser will erupt during the ritual and kill applicants with its lethally hot water. If they manage to make a successful leap, the geyser must erupt within a hundred heartbeats to show that the goddess approves. If it doesn't, applicants must leap again, and again, until the geyser erupts and the Priests are satisfied. The ritual becomes more dangerous with each successive leap.

The Warrior's ritual is hazardous, but it is nothing compared to the Priests's version. Rather than leaping, Priests climb into the mouth of the geyser, walk in a complete circle around the edge, and climb back up the other side, all while ragingly drunk. The longer they spend inside the geyser, the greater their prestige. Many have died horribly during this trial, rejected by the goddess and scalded beyond recognition. But such is the price of power in Tlatlahako.

GODS OF TLATLAHAKO

Center	Ometochtli, "2-Rabbit," Goddess of Maguey and Alcohol
East	Shimekatl, "Counter of Days," Goddess of Lore and Time
West	Tlakwepa, "Vomit Eater," Goddess of Filth, Confession, and Healing
North	Itziwitl, "Obsidian Feather," God of Volcanoes and Emotion
South	Sipaktli, Goddess of Earthquakes

NOTABLE KALPULTIN

TLATLAHATEKA, BURNING WATER PEOPLE

Tekali of Tlatlahako	
Heritage:	Strong Tlalteka, Weak Tonalteka
Size:	Small (around 10 Households)
Trades:	Land Management, Divination, Lore

The Tlatlahateka are a group of Tlatokay sages who spend their

time maintaining and adding to the lore of the Empire. They read and write codices, debate questions of philosophy and the nature of gods and spirits as well as craftsmanship and farming techniques, and track the stars each night with meticulous precision.

But the Tlatlahateka are not mere bookworms--drunken knowledge, mystical visions, and insight gained from distant sacred locations like the Speaking Cliffs or the Cave of Eternal Hunger are considered just as legitimate as scholarly writing, and are pursued with equal relish.

STORIES OF OLD

"Long ago, before maize grew in the Valley, before the Lake had filled, before even birds had learned to sing, the goddess Ometochtli sat atop the Kochewa mountains, watching the sky and counting the stars. Or rather, she was trying to count them, but as she did she faced many difficulties.

To keep her place in the sky, Ometochtli stretched up her thorn covered hand and moved it from star to star. But every time she started to make reasonable progress, a rabbit would come up and gnaw on her root-foot, causing her to leap with pain and poke another hole in the sky. After kicking the rabbit away she would have to start over, with yet another star to count. This happened again and again, and before long the sky was completely full of newly-poked stars, and Ometochtli's foot was bleeding and sore.

As she gazed frustratedly at the vast starfield before her, ready to give up on the whole project, Ometochtli saw a great milky-colored comet racing across the sky. It fell with great speed, leaving a long hazy trail behind, and as it passed near the mountain where Ometochtli sat, she reached up and caught it in her cupped hands. She curiously looked into her hands and discovered that the it was a great droplet of liquid. It was unlike any other liquid found on Earth or in the Sky, so Ometochtli knew that it must have fallen from Teomochi in the very highest heaven.

She tried to do a little dance to celebrate, but as she did she stepped on her sore foot. This caused her to stumble and slosh the liquid in her hands. A few smaller drops scattered across the landscape. We do not know where most of them landed, but one landed right here in the northeastern flats of the Valley. As it hit the Earth it sizzled and boiled, then erupted violently, raining burning hot water upon the land while also boring its way down deep into the ground. This drop became the geyser Xiwiwawitl.

The rabbits that pestered Ometochtli saw the eruption and hopped over to investigate. They found the boiling pool churning and roiling in its earthen pot, and because they were foolish they decided to drink it.

The burning water seared all their fur off and it scorched their insides so they couldn't eat grass or roots or anything that wasn't cooked. But it also filled them with a small drop of the





Everything, of Teomochi. These bald, burned, enlightened rabbits became our ancestors.

Knowledge comes from many sources, and most who seek it look to the wise and learned to find it. But that is not where our knowledge comes from. Our ancestors never stopped bothering Ometochtli, a creature much more powerful than they. They saw a cataclysmic explosion and ran *towards* it, rather than *away*. And they drank an unknown and obviously dangerous liquid they found boring into the rocks. Our knowledge comes from ignorance, stupidity, and irritating persistence.

But the liquid they drank happened to be the burning waters of Eternity, and so here we are today!"

--Kwikatochtli (Singing Rabbit), Tlamatini of Tlatlahako

DESCRIPTION

Most believe that the Tlatlahateka value knowledge above all things. This is true to some extent, but it drastically oversimplifies things. More than any piece of knowledge, the Tlatlahateka value *sources* of knowledge--people, places, and things that grant those who touch them greater insight and understanding into the universe. Codices, songs, stories, and the like are not valuable because of what they teach today. They are valuable because they teach something different every day.

Facts and beliefs are fleeting. They change with each generation, each day, each moment, even. But if you know how to *find* knowledge, you will never be thirsty for it. Knowing how to know is the most valuable thing you can learn.

This makes the Tlatlahateka seem enigmatic and even annoying to many who visit them. They have a reputation for being wise and knowledgeable, but so often they simply answer questions with more questions. Their purpose is not to give answers, but to guide others towards finding their own answers, to guide them towards sources of knowledge and let them learn what they will. People seldom find what they seek among the Tlatlahateka. But they often do find what they need.

As for the Tlatlahateka themselves, they are a curious paradox. They offer much wisdom to others, but they routinely make foolish mistakes when governing their own city. Though certainly not poor, the Tlatlahateka are probably the least wealthy Tekali in the Valley. They are notoriously inept at the delicate diplomacy that allows so many other cities to thrive, and they have also passed up some truly great opportunities to advance their Tekali in the Empire.

Despite their relative poverty, they are the most generous and accepting Tekali in the Empire. They ask little from those under their rule, and they are quick to grant lands to foreigners seeking a new home. Other Tekaltin say that that is why the Tlatlahateka are poor, but the Burning Water People believe that new knowledge is worth the cost of land and riches. Many value the wisdom of the Tlatlahateka, but just as many

pity them. They are victims of their visions who suffer to give others a better understanding of the world. Of course, what constitutes suffering is a matter of opinion. The Tlatlahateka have no problem with the state of their city and resist attempts to meddle in its affairs.

VIRTUES, VICES, AND WORDS OF THE OLD ONES

There will come a time when others have nothing left to Teach you. Their words will ring hollow and false--already heard, already considered, and already rejected. But there will *never* be a time when you have nothing left to Learn. Knowledge is the water of the mind, and you will never grow beyond your need for it. But like water, knowledge grows stale if you hold it for too long in the same jug.

Pour it out and move on. You will always find more.

Some day, however, you will find yourself in the Desert, and you will be afraid to pour out your stale knowledge-water. You will want to keep it until you find more.

Pour it out and move on. Others need the knowledge-water that you carry, for to them it is fresh and new. They will not release theirs until you release yours. Deserts are created when people fear to let go.

Be the rainmaker. Be the river spring. Pour it out and move on, and the knowledge of others will soon rain down upon you and flow past as a river. And even if it does not rain, even if you do not find a river, you can learn to collect dew from the air itself!



NOPALKWIKANI, THE CACTUS SINGERS

Kalpuli	
Heritage:	Strong Katzawak
Size:	Small (around 10 Households)
Trades:	Farming, Medicine Making

The Nopalkwikani just recently arrived in the Valley. They are a vagabond tribe from the Desert who were driven from their homeland by raiders. They sought refuge in the Valley a generation ago. Every city in the Empire turned them away until they came to Tlatlahako, which granted them a small piece of land and allowed them to settle as Mayekay.

The Nopalkwikani brought many troubles with them--a small population, strange customs, and a deep sense of failure for losing their beloved homeland. But they also brought an abundance of knowledge about plants and medicine. The only question is whether they will share it with the people of the Valley or use it against them.

STORIES OF OLD





We awoke in the Great Cave, the womb of the Earth. We were children of the land, unborn but aware. We heard the songs of the land, of our mother. We heard her speak. We heard her breathe. And from her, we learned the most beautiful songs. Because we awoke before we were born, we were born old and wise.

Our birth cry was our first song, a joyful melody to celebrate the world. The spirits of the world heard us and they came from far and wide to dance to our song. We emerged along with our brothers and sisters, but unlike us they did not awaken until they were born, so they were born young and naive. They did not know how to speak, much less sing. So we taught them. We sang them our beautiful songs and they learned the words of our mother. They thanked us for our songs, and went out into the world. The spirits continued to dance all around us.

After our brothers and sisters left, the Lizard spirit approached us. He was cold and slow from the long night, and he feared for his life. "If my enemies find me like this, I will not be able to escape them," he said. "You are wise beyond your years. Can you help me?"

So we sang a song so beautiful that the Sun heard us and peaked up over the horizon to listen. As she looked down to see who made the wonderful music, her light warmed the Lizard, who grew hot and fast. He thanked us and scampered off. The spirits continued to dance all around us.



After the Lizard left, the Tumbleweed spirit approached us. She yearned to wander free and find a faraway place to settle and raise her children. "The world is too calm and too settled, and I cannot bring myself to travel," she said. "You are wise beyond your years. Can you help me?"

So we sang a song so stirring that it roused the Wind. And as we sang, the Wind joined us, blowing across the land and adding its voice to ours. It picked up the Tumbleweed and carried her off. She thanked us for our song and tumbled away. The spirits continued to dance all around us.

Others came to us seeking our aid, and we gave a song to each visitor. The spirits danced, and many difficulties were resolved. But eventually we sang away our voices and sang away all our songs. And when we could no longer sing, nobody came to us for help. The spirits stopped dancing, and they left us alone in the world.

But one spirit stayed behind. His name was Matlakome-Atl (Twelve-Water). "You have sung your words and your wisdom. Your songs have gone out into the world, and now you must go, too. Find new words and new wisdom. Find your Voice, and we spirits will come again. Find your Voice, and you will find your Home." And with that, Matlakome-Atl melted into the Earth and flowed away.

So we went out into the world to find our Voice. As we journeyed, we heard many things. We heard the songs of the birds.

We heard the wind rustling through the trees. We heard the murmur of the streams and the roar of the waterfalls. We heard all of these songs, and we learned them. But we still had not found our Voice, so we could not sing them ourselves.

Our travels took us through many lands. We journeyed through forests. We journeyed through mountains. But when we journeyed through the desert, we found something new: a small green cactus, growing in the shadow of the mountains. It was well protected, covered in fierce thorns and tough skin. But we were thirsty and lost in a dry and lonely land, so we took this small cactus and swallowed it.

As the cactus passed down our throats, we felt something we had not known in generations, a song! After consuming the cactus, we began to sing again. It gave us Voices. It gave us songs. And as we sang, we saw the spirits from all around return to us and dance to our beautiful melodies.

Our Voices did not last forever. Each cactus had only a small bit of music, a small bit of Sound, and they were rare, even in the shadow of the mountain. But there, in that harsh land that we eventually learned to see as lush and beautiful, we found our Voice again. Spirits came to dance, and others came seeking our wisdom. And with our sacred cactus, our Voice that grows in the land we call Home, we found our place in the great march of spirits."

--Soona (Moon), Tlamatini of the Nopalkwikani

OVERVIEW

The Nopalkwikani are survivors. They are refugees struggling to sustain themselves and preserve their identity. They are foreigners in the Valley, and as long as they cling to their own customs, few will tolerate their company. Some members have assimilated into other Kalpultin to escape poverty and serfdom, but most refuse to give up their old ways.

Other Kalpultin smear them as Katzawak Vagabonds, but the Nopalkwikani are a sedentary people by nature. Their homeland was a small valley in the desert, one of the few places where farming was possible. They grew crops there and gathered materials from the surrounding area. By their own account, the Nopalkwikani were a peaceful, inoffensive people who were driven from their home by ruthless Tzatzini raiders. However, nobody had heard of them prior to their arrival in the Valley, so the truth is anyone's guess.

None believe in community as strongly as the Nopalkwikani, and this is why they survived. Kalpuli members are one family, and they selflessly work toward the common good, sacrificing personal opportunity and happiness so that the Kalpuli endures. To the Nopalkwikani, happiness is knowing that your children will grow up speaking the language of your ancestors, telling the old stories, and singing the cactus songs of home. It is at once inspiring and heartbreaking.





Despite their unity, the Nopalkwikani are divided on how to proceed. Some wish to keep their old culture but accept Tlatlahako as their new home. It is similar to their desert valley homeland, after all. Others insist that Tlatlahako is simply a rest stop. Home is in the Desert, and someday they will return. It is a difficult issue, and everybody feels both sides to some extent.

Outsiders believe that the Nopalkwikani have little to offer the rest of the Empire. They are skilled farmers, but they do not have the numbers to manage much land. They are subpar Warriors who could not defend their old homeland. Their low social status means they rarely become Priests. Few outside of Tlatlahako know of their true value: The Nopalkwikani are gifted healers, herbalists, and medicine makers who communicate with the spirits with uncanny ease.

Plant lore is a beloved tradition among the Nopalkwikani, who have a long history as gatherers. In order to be considered an adult a person must be able to name all the plants found within a week's walk of his or her home and give at least 10 uses for each. For dedicated medicine makers, the requirement is 50 uses for all plants within a week's walk and 100 uses for a single plant in which the medicine maker specializes.

Traditionally, they passed down plant lore from generation to generation, but since arriving in the Valley the Nopalkwikani have had to master a completely new set of plants. The current generation had to discover many of their uses on their own rather than learning from elders. Many of their discoveries are new to the people of the Valley as well. They have been so successful that some Nopalkwikani advocate making the discovery of new uses part of the coming of age ceremony.

Despite all these new discoveries, however, there is one plant from their homeland that the Nopalkwikani miss most bitterly. It is a small, dark green cactus known as the Singing Cactus, from which the Nopalkwikani get their name. It was their gateway to the universe, the cactus that gave them their voice. It was the music that made the spirits dance. But it only grows in their small desert valley homeland, far away.

Even without their cactus, the Nopalkwikani have learned to make at least some of the spirits dance. The plants of the valley are powerful and can make much music. But they are drums, flutes, whistles, and rattles. They do not give someone a Voice. However, as their numbers rebound, the Nopalkwikani discuss the wisdom of sending members into the Desert to bring back the Singing Cactus.

The Nopalkwikani are nearly friendless. They are perceived as both barbarous and weak, and so receive disdain from multiple directions for multiple reasons. They are also clannish and reserved, which only enhances their isolation. Their only friends are the spirits and the Tlatlahateka.

The Nopalkwikani embody everything the Tlatlahateka value. They are a source of knowledge. They possess unique skills and

traditions, and they constantly discover new ones. They lived beyond the Valley in a world that most know nothing about. The Tlatlahateka are eager to learn from the mysterious desert wanderers and have begun to ask them for insight into the events of the world, to the point where they can get a bit pushy.

The situation is very complicated. On the one hand, the Nopalkwikani must guard their secrets to protect their culture and enrich their people. But on the other hand, they are reluctant to anger their sole benefactors by withholding knowledge. On one hand, the Tlatlahateka made them Mayekay serfs instead of granting them free use of the land. But on the other hand, serfdom is better than starving in the wilderness.

Isn't it?

VIRTUES, VICES, AND WORDS OF THE OLD ONES

Do not fear to die for those who speak your words, who sing your songs, who dance your dances. We Nopalkwikani are nothing but words, songs, and dances. They are fires burning upon our backs. You will bear this flame for a time, but it does not belong to you. You belong to It. You will go cold and dark one day, never to speak, sing, or dance again. But so long as the fire you carry is passed on, it will burn forever, and you will live forever within it, and among us.

Beware of those who do not share our ways, who do not understand our songs. They are children who were born young and naive. They are careless and cruel, for they have not yet learned kindness. Children can learn to sing songs and use fire, but you must not teach them fire until they know how to contain it. You must not teach them to sing until they know that there are jaguars in the night who can find them.

TRIBUTARY CITIES

All the rest of cities in the Empire are Tributary Cities. The vast majority were defeated in war and now pay tribute to the Empire as a term of their surrender and protection against further aggression. The Tonalteka rarely depose foreign Tlatoanis if they can avoid it, and so long as they pay their tribute, they are allowed to live as they please. But tribute obligation can be a crushing burden, and Tributary Cities have no say in the affairs of the Empire. Their choice is simple: obey or be punished.

Of course, the situation varies with each individual city. Some Tributary Cities are willing members of the Empire who are happy to offer tribute in order to receive visits from the Pochteka Merchants and trade with others from across the world. Some cities are very remote, and therefore can be much bolder about refusing tribute demands and disobeying orders. Some negotiate secret deals with Tlatokay from the Empire and become almost like private fiefdoms hidden from away from Imperial notice.





TZATZIKO, PLACE OF SCREAMING

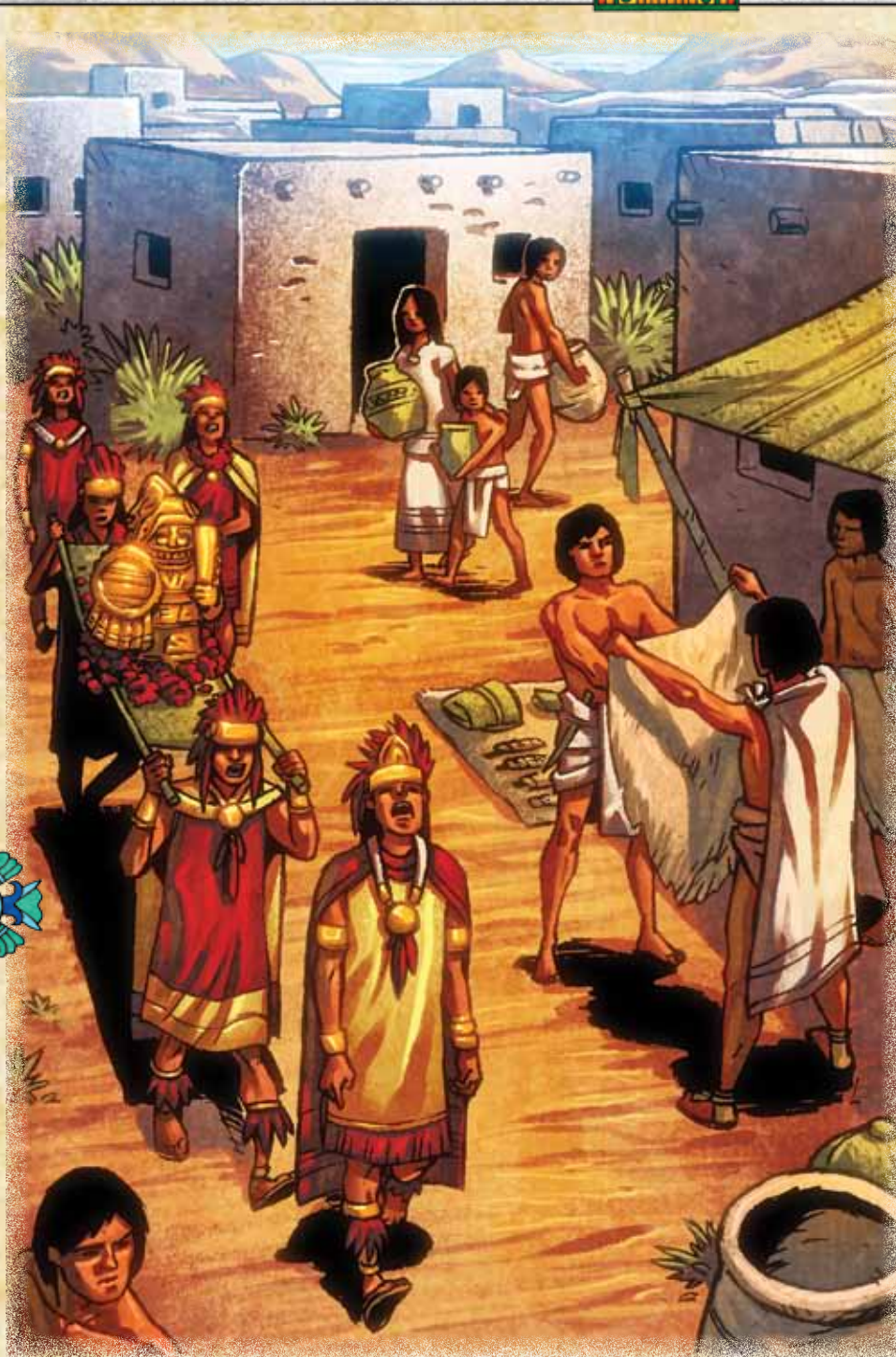
Tzatziko is less a city than a holy land. Located in the Desert a week's trip from the Valley, Tzatziko is a sacred place to many Desert tribes, Katzawak and Tzatzini alike. Bitter enemies approach Tzatziko in peace, crawling on their bellies to the sacred spring at the center that represents the lifeblood of the Desert People. Not even the most savage war chief will fight within a day's travel of this revered site.

The city itself isn't much to see. There are a few scattered dwellings, weathered and tired-looking from the constant onslaught of sun and wind, and a small market plaza that nevertheless sees a lot of business.

The strangest thing about Tzatziko is that there are no temples. The people of the Desert are nomads, and do not believe in building permanent structures to house their gods. Instead, groups of Priests known as Fire Priests carry the idols and sacred bundles on their backs constantly, forming a sort of living temple-parade. Each group endlessly wanders around outside a particular quarter of the city, periodically letting out blood-curdling screams in tribute to the gods.

Tzatziko is an important stop on the way to Kakayawanitlan. The Empire's armies stop there to rest, collect water, and resupply. A few other Desert cities pay tribute to the Empire, but they are even more remote. The Empire requires them to deliver their tribute to Tzatziko. They bring food, weapons, and soldiers here in preparation for the final assault at Apanotlan, The Land That None Pass.

Despite its small size, Tzatziko is held in high regard by the Empire. It is on the verge of becoming an Allied City, largely thanks to the efforts of the Teoyezteka. The Fire Priest Order of Tzatziko is highly respected and has served the Empire



The cities described below are but a sliver of the Empire. You may safely assume that there are many others waiting to be discovered.

The name given for each of the Tributary cities is the Tonaltekan name that the people of the Valley use. Valley-dwellers have a tendency to refer to their subjects not by their native names, but by the most important tribute item them provide. Hence, the city that pays its tribute in feathers is known as Iwitlan, City of Feathers, and so on.

Despite this dismissive attitude, each Tributary city is a complex, diverse community just like any of the Ruling or Allied Cities. They have their own names, their own languages, their own politics and mythology, and they do not take kindly to being pigeon-holed by arrogant nobles from the highlands of the Valley.



faithfully for a long time. They keep the only known idol of Oleetletl, god of fire and war, ruler of the age of the Red Sun. The Empire is keen on gaining favor from this powerful god, and many believe that Tzatziko has proven itself trustworthy enough to deserve a higher status.

IWITLAN, CITY OF FEATHERS

Like all cities in the Jungle, Iwitlan has no constant location. It floats through the trees, drifting from place to place over time. As its name suggests, Iwitlan is famous for its beautiful macaw and quetzal feathers, and it is one of the Empire's chief feather suppliers. If it were not a Tributary City, Iwitlan would have a powerful position over the cities of the Empire, a fact that is lost on no one.

Iwitlan grudgingly accepts being a Tributary City. The Alka'balum who live there are bitter about the defeat that led to their current situation, which has seriously impacted their city's prosperity. Long ago, it was one of the richest cities in the world. It traded beautiful feathers far north into the Desert, across the ocean to the eastern islands, and many other far-away places. But their tribute obligation consumes most of its feathers, and most of its wealth.

There is also a palpable sense of shame throughout the city. By and large, the Alka'balum consider themselves far more advanced than the people of the Valley, who they see as no better than arbarians. Constant reminders of their loss have only increased their hostility toward the Empire. Throwing off oppression is more than just a matter of economics. It is a matter of pride and honor.

Aside from its beautiful goods, however, the people of the Valley do not know much about Iwitlan. Its nobles are cultured and sophisticated, and several Tlatokay have even tried to forge marriages with them. Its Warriors are powerful though perhaps a little over-confident.

Also, like all the Alka'balum rulers, the Jaguar Kings of Iwitlan wield extraordinary influence over the jungle. Only by launching a devious sneak attack was the Empire able to conquer the city. But as Iwitlan grows more militant, the Empire may have to wage another war to retain its control. And it might be the Empire who ends up surprised this time.

ATZKALKO, PLACE OF SHELLS

Atzkalko is located in the Eastern Crescent on the coast of the great eastern ocean. Ruled by a group of Maiteka Merchant-Nobles, Atzkalko is, like most cities of the Crescent, really more of a trade center than a fully functioning city. As its name suggests, it is especially known for its fine seashells, which are collected off the beaches and cliffs and also from the ocean floor by skilled divers. Its most treasured export to the Empire are their conch shell trumpets, which are used to single the charge at the beginning of a battle. Atzkalko also has a huge variety of other exotic goods in which it deals as well.

Like all the coast cities, Atzkalko is the uneasy ruler of a string of rough-and-tumble river villages that passionately hate each other. Recently, the villages have gone from occasional raids to full on warfare, and their aggression continues to escalate. Many of Atzkalko's own Warriors have deserted the city's army to join one river faction or another, so the city is short on guards and barely able to keep the peace in its own streets.

Atzkalko is a willing member of the Empire, though it remains to be seen for how long. It sought out the Tonalteka and offered generous tribute terms in exchange for soldiers from the Empire. The Empire sent a modest contingent of soldiers to a garrison in Atzkalko. They have restored peace and security to the city, but violence still runs rampant in the countryside. The Empire would prefer to let the local rulers resolve the problem, but the local rulers are incapable of managing by themselves.

TOWNS

Vast numbers of small towns and villages dot the landscape of Semanawak. Although most drama is centered on the Cities, the majority of the population lives in rural towns. Most of them pay tribute to a nearby Altepetl, but a few are independent.

The small communities are relatively isolated from the larger affairs of the Empire, and this isolation breeds a lot of unique customs, beliefs, and rituals. Some of these are quite moving, while others can be absolutely terrifying. Townsfolk worship the gods of the city, but certainly aren't limited to them. They also deal with all kinds of spirits, who roam much more freely across the countryside than the gods who loom above. Strange shrines, unfamiliar gods, and bizarre superstitions are to be expected when traveling to rural towns.

Cities are places of power. They can defend themselves and wield force against others. They are confident and in control, and those from the cities are used to this worldview. But towns are rarely places of power. They bob and drift on the winds like seed pods, largely at the mercy of the cities and the gods. This means that most townsfolk are much more secretive, suspicious of outsiders, and open to alternate ways of gaining power...

ICHTAKAYOTLAN, LAND OF SECRETS

The secret village of Ichtakayotlan is nestled high on the dark mountain Teixtli, on the small plateau at its summit. It is a haven for shape shifting Nawal Sorcerers seeking to escape the prejudice and troubles that follow them throughout Semanawak. Although Ichtakayotlan is no more than a legend to most, many young Nawal Sorcerers search for it after being chased away from their communities. Those who persevere find a paradise where Nawal Sorcerers are nurtured, respected, and embraced.



The village is almost entirely inaccessible, surrounded on all sides by jagged cliffs and steep slopes. The only paths are those the Nawal Sorcerers create with their magic. The journey is grueling and perilous, and most who attempt it fall to their deaths or die of exposure on the rocks. Most residents instead transform into flying or climbing animals to come and go.

Ichtakayotlan has about two hundred residents, most of them Nawal Sorcerers. It is ruled by a small council of elders, who in turn elect a chief to speak for them. Most children are raised as Nawal Sorcerers, inheriting the talent from one or both of their parents. Those without the gift grow and gather food and other resources from the lush but unforgiving mountain slopes.

New Nawal Sorcerers occasionally find their way to the village and, after a brief interview with the elders, are usually welcomed as full members. All other outsiders are coldly turned away. The elders have even been known to resort to curses to ensure the silence of unwelcome intruders--more than a few have "accidentally" fallen to their deaths during the long, hard climb back down.

HISTORY

Ichtakayotlan is ages old and shrouded in mystery. Legend says that it was founded by the first Nawal Sorcerers ever to live, the twins Weyman (Venerable Time) and Saknite (White Flower). After being chased from their home (most in the village believe this home was Mixiwiliztlan, but nobody knows for sure), they were lead to the secluded plateau by a sympathetic animal spirit. There, they had a child, Yoltzin (Little Heart).

As they settled and grew powerful, they began recruiting promising apprentices from nearest villages to learn their skills. Weyman and Saknite began training their first apprentices, Mekatl (Rope, Lineage) and Zipaktonal (Harmonic Light), and named the small hamlet Ichtakayotlan, the Land of Secrets.

Unfortunately, a powerful warlord from the area named Nochewatl (Consistent) objected to this, and sought to crush these sorcerers before they could train others and become a threat to his power. He marched his army to the foot of Teixtli and there, under the light of a full moon, he ordered his Priests to perform a ritual to summon a terrible, ancient spirit known as the Tearer of Faces from the deepest, darkest reaches of the Underworld to slay the upstart sorcerers. The warlord then rested, preparing to claim the plateau and slay all any survivors of the spirit's attack upon the morning.

Weyman, Saknite, Mekatl, and Zipaktonal watched the camp below, debating plans for how to defeat the invaders, and as they did the Tearer of Faces approached silently. Before anyone could react, it was upon them, its dark power rending the life from young Yoltzin. Weyman and Saknite called on the Nawal spirits under their command to hold the Tearer of Faces back,

but the ancient spirit's power was immense. They could sense that the battle was lost.

Suddenly, the Wayob that had first led Weyman and Saknite to the plateau appeared to them again and led them to a cave hidden under the waterfall that ran off of the plateau. The large cave was remarkably smooth, with a small, cold, dark pool of water at its back. The Wayob signaled that only Weyman and Saknite should continue, and then transformed into a river dolphin and dove underwater. Weyman and Saknite followed while their apprentices anxiously waited at the cave's entrance.

Later that night, they resurfaced and led Mekatl and Zipaktonal to the center of the plateau, where a small grove of resilient trees grew. In the middle of the trees was a pure white stone that had not been there before. Weyman and Saknite bid their confused apprentices farewell, and approached the rock, chanting softly.

As the moonlight bathed their forms, the first Nawal Sorcerers raised their voices. The Tearer of Faces burst into the grove, snarling and charging at their motionless figures. Zipaktonal and Mekatl tried to call out, but at the same moment they felt a power radiating from the grove. A burst of blinding silver light enveloped the area and forced them to turn their eyes away. When they could see again, Weyman, Saknite, and the Tearer of Faces were gone, and the white rock was radiating a soft, silver glow.

Mekatl and Zipaktonal returned to the edge of the plateau just before dawn. Looking down, they were surprised to see that Nochewatl's army had packed up and was weaving its way down the mountain. The apprentices later learned that no one in the valley remembered Ichtakayotlan as anything more than a fantastic legend.

Mekatl and Zipaktonal could find no trace of their masters, though they noticed two large, identical stalagmites near the entrance of the cave beneath the waterfall where before there had only been smooth stone. They concluded that Weyman and Saknite had sacrificed themselves to call upon some great power of the mountain to alter memories across the entire valley and shroud the village in the mists of forgetfulness and doubt.

Mekatl and Zipaktonal named the white stone the Spirit Stone, and settled down on the plateau. They had several children together, all of whom were born Nawal Sorcerers, and ever since then their line has passed down the legend of Ichtakayotlan's founding and worked hard to create a safe, secret haven for Nawal Sorcerers.

THE SHADOW OF THE MOUNTAIN

Ichtakayotlan is a secluded place, but it is certainly not isolated. The Nawal Sorcerer residents move around the Valley a great deal. Some raid the villages on the Valley floor around Teixtli. Some explore and search for other Nawal Sorcerers to bring



back to Ichtakayotlan. Some simply seek excitement to escape the boredom of life on the plateau. But all of them consider Ichtakayotlan to be their true home, and return there when they need to escape the prejudice of the Valley.

All are bound to protect the secrecy of the village, but sometimes outsiders find out. This has happened three times over the years. Angry mobs or raiding parties approach the mountain, much like Nochewatl so long ago. But each time this happens, the elders call upon the Spirit Stone and melt all memory of the village from the outsiders.

Nobody knows the exact limit of the stone's power. It has power over memory and dreams, and it has the power to alter the landscape of the mountain. In many ways it is the Tonali of the mountain, the soul that grants Nawal Sorcerers their shape-shifting abilities. Some suspect that its effects could stretch all the way across the Valley if the people harnessed its full potential. But this much is known: those within the shadow of the mountain Teixtli are within the stone's power. Just as Nawal Sorcery draws upon the shadow of the sorcerer, Spirit Stone magic draws upon the shadow of the mountain.

CRACKS APPEAR

Despite the freedom and tolerance for Nawal Sorcerers, life in Ichtakayotlan is far from perfect these days. The village is divided into two factions, each with a different vision for the future. One faction wishes to reveal the village to the rest of Semanawak and trade openly with other communities. The other dreams of using the Spirit Stone to gain tribute from them.

The Spirit Stone does indeed contain great power, more than even the oldest sages have yet discovered. But ancient tradition set forth by Mekatl and Zipaktol forbids the village from using it except in the most dire of emergencies.

The militant faction sees this as a great opportunity for the village—even the cities won't be able to stand against them if they harness the power of the Spirit Stone! The trading faction sees this as a great defense—why cling to secrecy when the Spirit Stone provides such a perfect shelter? The threat alone would discourage any trifling invaders.

But neither group seems to have noticed one small fact about the Spirit Stone: when it was first discovered, it was pure white and completely smooth, like a great stone egg. But today it is covered with many tiny cracks, impossible to see at a distance but unmistakable to those who look closely. Each time the sorcerers call upon it, more cracks appear.

Nobody knows how many times it can be safely used. Nobody knows what would happen if it broke. And most importantly, nobody knows whether the Tearer of Faces was actually defeated.

Or merely imprisoned.

WIKTLAN, PLACE OF SPADES

Wiktlan is a village in the Jungle that is located on several major trade routes from the Valley. It is home to only a few families, but despite this it is one of the easiest settlements to find in the Jungle. Its location remains oddly constant in the shifting forest, like a post beacon driven into the floor of the ocean. It is so reliable that Pochteka Merchants use it as a navigation point. Nobody is sure why this is the case, but it is quite convenient. It also produces a surprisingly large amount of food. It has become a popular waypoint for travelers moving into or out of the Jungle.

Most villages would be thrilled with this distinction. In time, such a place could easily become a city. But the people of Wiktlan seem oddly distressed about it. They are cold and nervous around outsiders and refuse to let anyone from outside the village settle there. They also look perpetually guilty, as though you just caught them stealing something. Though many people move through Wiktlan, few travelers linger in such an eerie, uncomfortable place.

The people of Wiktlan consider themselves Alka'balum, but all the Alka'balum in the neighboring communities are quick to differentiate themselves from this small village. They angrily refer to the people there as "Cursed" or "Sick," and refuse to have anything to do with them. Their disdain is so strong that they refuse to even go to war against Wiktlan. The small village is completely free, and pays tribute to no one. It is a leper that even the taxman fears to visit. The only people who go there are Valley dwellers.

The area around Wiktlan is rather unpleasant. Most of the Jungle is lush and almost painfully alive, but the forest around Wiktlan has a sick, wilted look to it. It is also full of fierce stinging insects. This is surprising to most people, because everywhere else in the Jungle the bees are stingless and docile. They make sweet honey and breathe life into the flowers. But in Wiktlan they cause pain and irritation and occasionally band together into frightening swarms that drive even those who live there into hiding.

The people of Wiktlan are hiding something. Anyone who stays for more than a few days can tell that something is seriously wrong in the area. No other Alka'balum settlements suffer so much at the hands of the forest around them. And those who pay close attention notice that travelers who head into the forests south of Wiktlan never return.

But so far, most are content to let the dark secrets of Wiktlan remain in the shadows. Most simply choose to move on after a few days.

TLEKWAZKO, BRAZIER

This prosperous town is located on the western shore of Lake Ketzalatezkatl, right at the foot of Tleteoxiwakan. It is the closest settlement to the holy ruins, and as such it is a popular stop for





pilgrims planning to visit and seek the wisdom of the ancients.

Though it technically belongs to Xochitlan, the Xochiteka have designated it as a place where all are welcome. Travelers bring food, goods, or some other sort of tribute to give to the villagers so that they may provide free lodging to travelers and well-maintained paths to the ruins. Tlekwazko is essentially a gateway to Tleteoxiwakan, a welcome center, and base camp for those who would glimpse the sacred fire burning there.

There is a small garrison stationed in Tlekwazko to keep the peace and ensure that visitors are respectful. There are many feuds that divide the Empire, and far too many come to the ruins hoping to loot and make off with idols and artifacts. But the Warriors of Tlekwazko put a swift end to any fights and ensure that any thieves who are caught are swiftly and mercilessly executed for their blasphemy.

Despite this threat, the town still attracts a fair number of unsavory sorts who deal in black market artifacts. Some are professional scavengers or smugglers who make repeated trips into the ruins and take whatever isn't fastened down. Others are fences who are interested in specific pieces from history. Still others are frauds who take fees to act as "tour guides" and then rob those foolish enough to follow them into an out of the way chamber.



THE FIVE SUNS LEGEND, PART 2

As told by Teoxiwtl (Precious Turquoise), Singing Priestess of Ilwikakalko.

THE FIRST SUN

As the gods bickered over what to do next, Oleletletl, the strongest and bravest in the heavens, stepped forward, his gait strong but awkward because of his missing foot:

"We tried to fill this world with creatures, but we were all so concerned with our own creations that we forgot the larger design and ended up with a divided world. What this world needs is a single ruler, guiding and shaping and uniting it! Instead of a thousand stars and a thousand gods in the sky above it, there should be one single burning light! What this world needs is a Sun!"

The other gods cheered Oleletletl. Weystitalin murmured something softly, but no one else heard her, so they assumed she was also cheering. Oleletletl spoke again:

"Yes, this world needs a Sun. I am the strongest and the warmest of us all. I gave my foot, my own flesh and blood, in battle to allow this world to be created. I shall be the Sun! Are there any who challenge me?"

The other gods stopped cheering, but none were willing to challenge the powerful Oleletletl, at least not just yet. With their silence, the gods agreed to let Oleletletl be the Sun of this world. Oleletletl spoke again:

"Very well. You may watch as I make this world right!"

PLACE OF THE SACRED FLAME

So the gods came down to the world and raised up Tleteoxiwakan, the sacred mountain on the shores of Lake Ketzalatezkatl, the place where the First Sun rose, and gathered in a circle around Oleletletl, who looked up towards the sky and in an instant burst into dark red flames and rose, higher and higher, until he sat above the world and his light illuminated the land and caused the animals to look up in wonder and amazement.

Oleletletl fixed his gaze upon Tleteoxiwakan, and from his eyes came rays of the hottest flame. The flames struck the ground, and from them arose an army, each soldier made from red and orange fire and dark gray ash, each one casting heat and light to the horizon, each one shouting bravely to the earth and all the heavens and leaving a smoldering trail of embers in their tracks. From Oleletletl the Red Sun, the Fire People were born.

PEOPLE OF FLAME

Oleletletl taught his Fire People. He taught them Strength so they could change the world. He taught them Bravery so they would never be afraid. At first the Fire People were wild and





uncontained, like a forest fire in a hard wind, but Oleletletl also taught them Discipline so they could be soldiers. He taught them these things, and then told them to use these virtues to find meaning and nourish the gods.

And so the Fire People used what they had learned, and fought and fought and fought. They waged terrible and endless war across the world. They fought as armies, and they fought as individuals. They fought without fear. The Fire People seared the world with their wars, and in time there was very little that remained besides ash. There were also very few Fire People left, for their wars left no time to raise Fire Children, even as they claimed thousands of lives each day.

WAR OF ASHES

The other gods watched their world burn, and they were sad. Weysitlalin murmured something softly, but no one else heard her, so they assumed she was also sad. Itztechiwani, angry at the thoughtless destruction of such wonders as the world once contained, returned to Tleteoxiwakan and from there lept up into the sky. She flew into Oleletletl's face, blocking out his light and plunging the world into darkness. Itztechiwani pointed down at the world and spoke:

"Look, great Oleletletl! Your world is burning, your people are dying! It may burn for some time yet, but one day they will run out of things to burn, and then they will all be dead, leaving nothing but cinders behind. Your people fight bravely, but their lands are nothing but burnt ashes, not even worth fighting for! War brings no glory when it destroys the land, when you fight for no reason other than to fight some more. Your people are warriors who have killed what they were sent to protect. Look, great Oleletletl!"

But though he looked down at the world, Oleletletl could not see the truth of Itztechiwani's words. He looked over these wars of fire and saw his creations as beautiful, for what parent can see anything else in their children?

THE RAIN OF EARTH

And so they fought. Itztechiwani pulled a shard of obsidian from herself and made it into a knife. She cunningly began to fall back in the sky, and as Oleletletl bravely pursued her she cut his hand off and threw him down from the sky. He landed far to the north and scorched the land so badly that it remains red and scorched to this day. That is why there is a great burning desert to the north of our territory, and tribes of fierce warriors who live there.

Itztechiwani spread her arms, and at her command stones, soil, and earth began to rain down from the sky. Soil covered up the burnt ash and stones crushed the Fire People who were still fighting. As the sky rained down earth, the Fire People battled on and were buried. Most of them died as Itztechiwani entombed them beneath the earth, but a few, the greatest and most vicious warlords, continued to burn even after they were

buried, and continue to burn to this day. That is why there is fire beneath the earth, and volcanoes and magma.

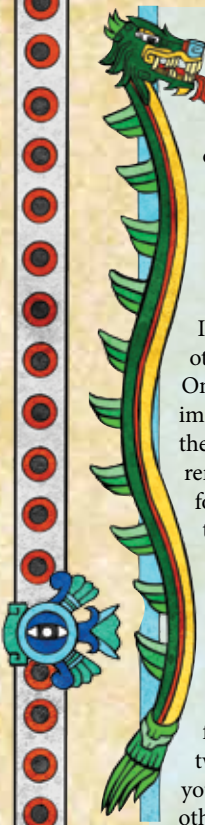
VULTURES LAND

As the Fire People died, Xolokwani snuck up behind some of them and knocked them out with a blow to the head. He dragged the flaming bodies and threw them down a deep hole that only he knew of. This hole lead to a secret corner beneath the earth, down in the Underworld, and after stealing the Fire People Xolokwani returned to Tleteoxiwakan and pretended he was never gone. Weysitlalin saw what he had done and murmured something softly, but no one else heard her, not even Xolokwani, so they assumed that everything was fine.



SACRED CONFLICTS

Semanawak is above all else a land of conflict. The people, the gods, the land, and all the elements that comprise it are in a constant state of opposition with one another. Each pushes and pulls against the others, and is pushed and pulled in return. It is a land of a thousand dramas, a thousand climaxes, a thousand victories, and a thousand defeats.



"Imagine there is a great round pit in the ground. Standing across from each other at the edge of this pit are two men, each pulling on a rope stretched between them. One man pulls to the north, and the other to the south. So long as both men pull with equal force, they remain safely balanced on the edge of the pit. But if either falters or grows stronger than the other, one of them will be pulled in and drag the other down with him.

Imagine there are also two women across from each other, each pulling on a rope stretched between them. One woman pulls east, and the other pulls west. And imagine that their rope is joined with the rope pulled by the men. So long as each pair pulls with equal force, they remain safely balanced on the edge. But if any one of the four corners falter or grow stronger than the others, three will be pulled into the pit, and drag the fourth down with them.

This is Peace. Most think Peace is the absence of conflict, but in reality Peace is Balanced Conflict.

Can there ever be a true absence of conflict? Can all four corners simply stop pulling, and let the ropes between them fall away? Perhaps. But you must trust that your enemy will stop fighting against you, and that all other enemies will also stop fighting against each other. Because if one pulls, so must all others.

I will never stop hoping for the day when such trust is possible. But until then, those who seek peace are better off trusting in the continued hatred of their enemies than in their forgiveness."

--Weykatlachiani (Far-Sighted), Moon Priestess of Teoyezteko

These conflicts take many forms. Some, like war, are obvious. But others are far less so--the sea's constant push against the land, the volcanic creation of Earth against the constant erosion of rain and wind, and the light of day against the dark of night.

But out of these conflicts, a strange sort of stability emerges. This stability is not static. It is cyclical. Everything is in motion, but over time losses are matched by gains.

Perhaps the greatest example of this is the cycle of water. Rain falls from the sky, runs across the Earth, and then evaporates and returns to the sky. Each drop of water constantly moves on its own unique journey through the universe. It is buffet-

ed by the wind during its fall, it cuts through the ground as it flows, and it dies in the lowest place only to be reborn to do the same thing all over again. But through this conflicted movement, water across the universe remains in balance. The life and death of water creates a long term stability.

The enemy of this stability is, paradoxically, Stillness. If water stops moving, there is catastrophe. If the Sky keeps more water than it rains down, there is drought on Earth. If the Earth keeps more water than it returns to the Sky, the water will become foul and polluted and impossible to use.

An individual life begins and ends, and during that span it faces terrible struggles. But through these struggles, through these conflicts, Life itself is sustained throughout the universe.

WAR

Wars are the most straightforward conflicts in Semanawak. They are literal fights between adversaries, killing and being killed in return. They are glorious, and one of the most respectable roads to higher status. But for every Warrior who has achieved fame and fortune through war, there are ten who have died young and ignominiously.

WHY PEOPLE FIGHT

There are as many reasons to fight in Semanawak as there are in our own world. Some of them are admirable, some of them are not.

The most important reason, and the reason that honorable Warriors claim is the only "real" reason, is spiritual. The gods require sacrifices to keep the universe running, and only the finest, most worthy sacrifices will do. War allows Warriors to find opponents, test their worthiness, and capture them to offer at the temples of their Altepetl.

People also fight for political and material gain. Defeated enemies must pay tribute and provide food, goods, and services



"Many believe that War is the beginning of a fight, but in reality War happens because a side has *stopped* fighting. War happens when one side becomes weak, when it surrenders its search for strength within itself and falls out of balance with its opponent.

Never falter in your pursuit of strength. You have been given a corner of the universe to hold up, and it is your duty to be strong enough to support it. Weakness is an invitation to your enemies."

--Tonawak (One Who Possesses Light), Eagle Warrior of Teoyezteko

to the ones who defeated them, which makes the lives of the victors easier and more pleasant. Tribute is a complex idea and is discussed in greater detail later, but it is one of the major reasons why Altepetls go to war, and is generally considered an honorable pursuit.

Many people fight for fame and prestige. A Warrior who performs well is the envy of society. He is rewarded with riches, praised by all around him, and may rest assured that his children will have better lives for his efforts. An Altepetl that performs well in war will attract additional members who seek protection and the chance to earn glory, and their skills and talents will greatly increase its prosperity. Also, few are willing to trifle with Warriors or Altepetls that have proven their skills in war.

In addition to these honorable reasons, however, there are innumerable ones that are far less so--hatred, vengeance, cruelty, xenophobia, desperation, and so on. People may try to disguise and dress up these vile motives as much as possible, but they are an undeniable part of warfare in Semanawak.

ANGRY WARS AND FLOWER WARS

Not all wars are the same. There are two major types of warfare in Semanawak: Angry Wars (Kokoltikyaoyotl) and Flower Wars (Xochiyaoyotl).

KOKOLTIKYAOYOTL--ANGRY WAR

Angry Wars are full on wars, where opponents attack each other in whatever ways are possible. Soldiers, villages, farms, and cities are all valid targets in an Angry War, and all tactical maneuvers are fair game. Merciful combatants may choose to avoid certain brutal tactics and certain civilian targets, and pious individuals may still seek captives instead of kills. But the ultimate objective of an Angry War is victory.

Angry Wars may result in the complete destruction of the enemy Altepetl, but in practice this is extremely rare. More often, an Altepetl surrenders after its army is beaten and defeat is inevitable and offers tribute, at which point the war ends and the attacker leaves. Most of the time the attacker doesn't even enter the surrendering city. But sometimes particularly bitter enemies will refuse to surrender or refuse to accept tribute. In this case, the Angry War goes until the attacker captures the temples in the center of the city.

Angry Wars almost always occur between the Empire and outsiders, either against the Kakayawani or Altepetls that are not yet members. They may also be waged against Altepetls in rebellion. The Wey Tlatoani forbids Angry Wars between members of the Empire, for they damage imperial unity and seriously harm productivity. However, it has happened in the past. And continued tensions between the members make it likely that it will happen again in the future, regardless of Tonalteka decrees.

In accordance with ancient tradition, the Ruling Cities will not engage in Angry Wars against each other. Violence between Tonalteka people was the reason for their expulsion from the Valley long ago by the Eaters of Light, and this must be avoided at all costs. It would take a truly exceptional set of circumstances to cause an Angry War between Ruling Cities.

XOCHIAOYOTL--FLOWER WAR

Flower Wars are highly structured conflicts that combatants negotiate and set up in advance. They take place exclusively between the elite Warriors of the participating Altepetls at pre-arranged times and locations, and are fought almost entirely for captives and prestige.

Flower Wars are almost like tournaments. The two sides plan a number of smaller battles between Warriors of similar skill levels and ensure that no one else from either side interferes. In addition, individual Warriors may challenge each other, in which case the leaders set up arranged duels between them.

This allows Warriors to vent their violent energies against each other without destroying villages and cropland, as well as practice their skills and gain prestige in a structured, sanctioned environment. It also makes it much easier to take captives, which further adds to their prestige and also provides worthy sacrifices for all participating Altepetls.

The ideal Flower War involves no malice between opponents, and doesn't result in a clear winner or loser. It is as close to a 'good fight' as one can get. It is more like a religious ritual than a war. It is a sacred exchange of captives between sides, like the exchange of water between Earth and Sky.

There are other reasons behind Flower Wars as well. When fought against outsiders, they allow the Empire to size up an enemy without risking a full on war. If the outsiders perform well, it might be better to leave them alone for the time being, or at least use other means to bring them down. They can allow a large city to wear down a smaller opponent prior to an Angry War conquest, or even intimidate them into paying tribute without a fight.

Flower Wars also allow members of the Empire to compete without risking land. Sometimes this enablesthem to settle grudges and rivalries, but more often it actually introduces such rivalries. This is deliberate. The Ruling Cities encourage and often require Flower Wars to ensure that their allies remain in constant conflict with each other. This reduces the chances that they will unite and rebel against their Tonalteka rulers.

In addition, Flower Wars allow the Ruling Cities to demonstrate their military superiority when they wage them against their subjects. When Xochitlan holds a Flower War against Popokatetlan, for instance, it shows Popokatetlan what it will face should it choose to rebel. If the Warriors of Xochitlan fight with overwhelming skill, Popokatetlan will be too afraid to try





anything. It may also lose its best Warriors as captives, which further undermines its ability to rebel.

Of course, this can easily backfire. If Xochitlan performs poorly, it will lose many of its finest Warriors and reveal its weakness. Therefore, even though Flower Wars do not really have winners and losers, the Ruling Cities go to great lengths to ensure that they “win.” They seek the greatest Warriors, the greatest trainers, and the greatest equipment. And when that fails, there are many more deceitful techniques at their disposal as well...

The Ruling Cities are prohibited by tradition from fighting Flower Wars against each other directly. However, they often compete via proxy. For instance, if Xochitlan is fighting a Flower War against Popokatetlan, Mixiwiliztlan might provide support to Popokatetlan to undermine its Ruling City rival indirectly. It might lend trainers, weapons, and sometimes even Warriors to try to embarrass Xochitlan and make it appear weak.

WHO FIGHTS

The most illustrious participants in war are the elite Warriors, professionals who devote their entire lives to fighting. Their obvious skill and elaborate costumes strike terror into the hearts of the enemy, and their bravery and resolve ultimately determine the outcome of the battle.



Priests are also important participants during and after the war. They march into battle alongside the Warriors, call upon the gods to support their side, and ensure that the divine beings are witness to such brave and noble combat. Afterwards, they offer up sacrifices to thank the gods and ensure their continued favor.

The majority of people who go to war, however, are Masewal soldiers. These commoners spend most of the year at other professions, but when their city goes to war they pick up weapons and fight under the command of the Warriors. Every boy and many girls receive basic military training at the Telpochkali school, and each Kalpuli is required to supply a certain number of soldiers as part of its tribute. Some Kalpultin choose to send the same people year after year. Others prefer to share the burden and require everybody to serve every few years.

Many Masewal soldiers become quite skilled. Military prowess is highly respected, and practicing is a popular leisure activity. But they are not professionals. They do not have the practiced skills and bravery of elite Warriors. Therefore, Masewal soldiers usually serve in support roles--archers, slingers, defensive spearmen, and reserves sent in to mop up after the elites break the enemy lines.

Most Masewal soldiers will never be anything more. But even the greatest Warriors started out as humble soldiers following their fathers and older brothers into battle. The very best soldiers may eventually earn the chance to become elite Warriors.

WARRIOR HOUSES

Elite Warriors band together into military fraternities known as Warrior Houses. These ancient organizations are extremely influential, both militarily and socially. They are like Kalpultin unto themselves. Each one has a long history pre-dating the Empire, its own creed and customs, and even its own gods. They define and codify what it is to be a Warrior in Seman-awak, and teach their members how to live up to this sacred title both on and off the battlefield.

Long ago, Warriors were little more than savage bandits and warlords. They used their skills and power to take what they wanted from those weaker than themselves. They fought each other and oppressed the people, and many died without purpose or meaning.

Each House was founded by one of these ancient warlords. They all started out cruel and heartless, but through spiritual vision they eventually realized that warfare could serve a greater purpose. They established rules to help other Warriors harness their skills and passion for noble causes, rather than simply preying on the weak. They developed philosophies for living as well as fighting. They turned Warriors from monsters into men.

The Warriors of today worship these founders as ancestor-gods. Their teachings are sacred truths, and those who follow them are inevitably guided towards a better life. But walking in the footsteps of a god brings more than just wisdom. It also brings power. Members of a Warrior House earn their tremendous abilities by fulfilling the cherished codes laid out by the founders. By acting as the founders did, they become their living vessels. Their teachings simultaneously empower Warriors and lead them towards a greater purpose. Those who seek power must serve justice to get it. Those who seek justice are made powerful enough to enforce it.

Through the sacred vision of Warrior Houses, Might is transformed into Right.

WARRIOR HOUSES IN SOCIETY

The Warrior Houses are like branches of the military. Just as a modern country might have Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines, the Empire has the four major Warrior Houses: the Jaguar Warriors, the Eagle Warriors, the Screaming Ones, and the Shorn Ones. Each advocates certain virtues, condemns certain vices, and specializes in different tactics and styles of fighting. They often disagree vehemently about what makes a great Warrior and maintain great rivalries between themselves. But no one House can win the battle alone, so they must learn to live and fight together.

Warrior Houses exist outside of the Altepetls of the Empire. Each member owes loyalty to an Altepetl, and dedicated service to one's Altepetl is a universal virtue taught by all Warrior Houses. But the Houses themselves extend beyond national borders.





JAGUAR WARRIORS

"The greatness of a Warrior comes from the greatness of his deeds."

Founded by the great Warrior-god Chalchiwiztli (Jade Child), the Jaguar Warriors follow a code of unseen, unsung service to the Empire. They perform glorious deeds, but choose to hide these deeds in the shadows.

Chalchiwiztli was a vain bully who demanded constant praise and worship from the people he terrorized. In his arrogance he took the title of Jaguar Lord, claiming that his might made him the equal of the sacred animal. But one day he encountered a true jaguar in the mountains to the west and had the nerve to address it as "brother." The Jaguar looked at him with disdain, and spoke:

"The Jaguar is indeed beautiful and powerful, but he lives his life in the shadows. He performs his great deeds in secret. He does not demand praise for his prowess, nor speak of his accomplishments. They speak for themselves. True greatness comes only when others recognize it despite the fact that you hide it from all eyes.

You are no brother of mine, Chalchiwiztli. You are no jaguar. You merely wear its skin."

Chalchiwiztli bowed to the jaguar's wisdom and vowed to live by it and teach his followers to do likewise. Therefore, Jaguar Warriors are taught to be modest and secretive. They never boast about their deeds, but instead perform them in secret. Their elusiveness serves the Empire well--they are masters of stealth, and serve as the scouts and special operatives of the Empire.

CREED OF THE JAGUAR WARRIORS

The enemy should never know the truth, and if he does, he should never realize it. Your greatest hiding place is your enemy's ignorance, and the longer you maintain it the more effective you will be. If you sneak into his camp and kill his men, he will simply post more sentries. You will be but a human. But if you sneak into his camp and make his men vanish without a trace, you will become every shadow, every rustle in the bushes, and every spirit he fears.

Let your deeds speak for themselves. Do not brag or boast. Do not tell anyone, except for your superiors and your House brothers. Our House has much arrogance to atone for, and stealth is the burden we must bear. We do things because they must be done, not because we seek fame and glory. When we perform great deeds and when we help people, we do it in secrecy, with none but the gods as witnesses. If others hear of these things despite our silence, we may allow them to hang jade upon us if it makes them feel better. But otherwise we must go without.

True goodness is done solely for its own sake, and only when you do it with no hope of reward or praise can you truly consider yourself good.

No one Altepetl controls a House. Each has its own leaders and its own hierarchy, and members are expected to be loyal to the House as well as their Altepetl (though it is up to the individual to decide whether loyalty to House or Altepetl is paramount).

Different regions have different Houses. The Empire and the Kakayawani each have their own completely separate organizations--the Kakayawani have Vulture Warriors, Skull Warriors, Coyote Warriors, and Moon Warriors. But there is some overlap--the Screaming Ones originally come from the Desert, and some members fight for the Empire while others fight against it.

The existence of the Houses is no secret. Everybody knows and respects them and envies those capable enough to earn membership. But the internal affairs of each House are closely guarded secrets. The initiation rituals, the training methods, the secret battle maneuvers, the politics--these must not be shared with anyone outside the House. Those who betray the secrets of their House are hunted down and killed without mercy.

EAGLE WARRIORS

"The greatness of a Warrior comes from the greatness of those he leads."

Founded by the great Warrior-god Mixtlakwkwik (Cloud Sculptor), the Eagle Warriors follow a code of inspiration and leadership by example. They do great things to show others that great things are possible. They face terrible danger to give courage to others.

Mixtlakwkwik was a powerful warlord who commanded many men. He defeated countless enemies, but as his power grew he became jealous and spiteful. Those who were beautiful were disfigured so that only he could possess beauty. Those who had fine things were stripped of them so that only he could be rich. Those who accomplished great deeds were killed so they would never rise up to challenge his greatness. All were made to kneel so that he could sit highest of all. And if anyone so much as looked up at him, their eyes would be put out.

But then one day he saw an eagle soaring overhead. He became enraged that this creature flew higher than he. He shouted up to the eagle and demanded that it bow to him and offer him its feathers in tribute.

The Eagle looked down at Mixtlakwkwik and let out a cry that echoed across the Valley:

"You wonder why I fly higher than you? It is because the people you stand on have been crushed. The greatness of a leader comes from the greatness of his followers. If his followers are strong and prosperous, then they will stand tall and lift the one who leads them to new heights. But there is no glory in ruling over a land of misery and poverty. You do not fly, Mixtlakwkwik--you merely chop down any who are taller than you."

Mixtlakwkwik bowed to the eagle's wisdom and vowed to live by it and teach his followers to do likewise. Therefore, Eagle Warriors are taught to inspire those under them to achieve greatness, to support them and teach them and give them examples to aspire to. Their magnificence serves the Empire well--they are the leaders of the armies, the ones whose words move men to fight like gods and whose actions bring light to even to darkest corners of despair.

CREED OF THE EAGLE WARRIORS

There is nothing more moving than an Eagle in the sky! The way it soars, the way it cries out, and the way it kills inspire all who see it. Cowards become brave, the dismal are made joyous, and the cynical feel hope. But what if you were to see an Eagle dead and rotting on the ground, its feathers cracked, its eyes eaten out, and its guts full of maggots? A dead Eagle is just



an animal, another pitiful creature that failed to avoid starvation and sickness. But a flying Eagle is a symbol.

To be a leader is to be a symbol. You must soar, you must cry out boldly, and you must kill with exquisite ease so your men will take heart and accomplish the impossible. Humans are creatures of spirit, and if you fill them with greatness there is nothing they cannot achieve. But the human spirit draws its strength from its symbols, from its leaders. You must never let your men see you rot. You must never let them see you as human. Because if you do, the greatness in them will turn to a belly full of maggots.

A leader must look after his image and become the ideal he wishes his men to pursue. He must seek fame and glory, and protect it from the slander of others and the shame of his own misdeeds. This is not vanity. When you become a leader, you give up your image to the service of others. Your name and your reputation are no longer your own--they belong to those who follow you.

If you are falsely modest, you rob them of their dreams and inspiration. And if you allow harm to come to your name, you hurt not just yourself but all who depend upon you.

SCREAMING ONES

"The greatness of a Warrior comes from the greatness of his opponents."

Founded by the great Warrior-god Chiltikizwatl (Red Leaf), the Screaming Ones follow a code of courage and strength through constant struggle. Glory and growth come from facing adversity. Only by confronting things greater than yourself can you yourself become great.

Chiltikizwatl was a proud Warrior from the Desert. There were none more powerful than him in all that land, and he knew it. So he spent his days wandering from place to place and making outrageous demands of the people. Those who were cowardly fled from him. Those who were brave fought him and died. Eventually there was no one left to face him. Chiltikizwatl boasted that he had conquered fear itself, because there was no one in the world that could make him afraid.

But one day he was approached by a young girl. She had been mauled by wolves as a child, and her leg was twisted and scarred and weak, but nevertheless she went up to Chiltikizwatl, met his eye, and told him that she was braver than he. He laughed and lunged at her, and though she flinched she did not flee. She then spoke:

"I am afraid of you, Chiltikizwatl, but I still stand before you and speak. You are greater than I and could kill me if you chose, and because I face you, I am great. But you have never faced anyone greater than yourself. Bravery is not the absence of fear--it is the ability to go on despite the fear, to go on *because* of the fear! You have killed more men than I ever will. You are stronger than I will ever be. But until you face someone stronger than you, someone you fear, I will always be braver than you!"

Chiltikizwatl bowed to the girl's wisdom and vowed to live by it and teach his followers to do likewise. Therefore, Screaming Ones are taught to seek out new challenges, to face fear and pain and battle against those stronger than themselves, rather

than preying on the weak. A Warrior who faces only weaklings is a weakling himself. The worthier the opponent, the worthier the Warrior. Their drive serves the Empire well--they are the shock troops of the armies, the ones who charge the strongest enemy formations and break their lines.

CREED OF THE SCREAMING ONES

Fear is the ultimate struggle of human existence. It is the weight that holds us down on Earth. Without fear, we would soar the skies like the Eagles. But it is not a weight that we can simply put down. It is our place to carry it. Humans know and understand, and therefore we are the bearers of fear in the world. The Screaming Ones know that, in order to carry your fear, you must be strong.

Like so many things, fear has a dual nature: it is useful but very dangerous. Fear can rob you of your strength, or make you hit harder and truer than you ever could normally.

Fear can steal away your voice, or make it bold and uncompromising and fill it with pure truth. Fear is behind hatred and xenophobia and all the despicable acts of humanity. But it can also force you to hold to your ideals.

Fear is like a fire--if you lose control it will consume you, but if you master it you will wield the greatest power known.

Seek always to become stronger through your fear, and to use it to achieve good and just ends.

Fear will tell you where your weaknesses are, and by facing them you will become great.



SHORN ONES

"The greatness of a Warrior comes from the greatness of what he fights for."

Founded by the great Warrior-god Weywetz-kaiwitl (Laughing Feather), the Shorn Ones follow a code of stoicism, endurance, and determination despite all hardship. Anybody can be strong for a moment. But the Shorn Ones follow the way of the Farmer, who is strong all day, every day.

Weywetzkaiwitl was a cruel, sadistic Warrior who wandered from town to town, preying on farmers like a ravenous predator. He stole their food, destroyed what was left, tormented them for days, and then moved on to the next town. Such was his cruelty that many believed he fed not on food, but on screams.

The farmers were long-suffering, but eventually they had enough. One by one they packed up and left, and as they did food became scarcer and scarcer.

Soon Weywetzkaiwitl began to starve. Hungry and desperate, he approached the last remaining town. It too was abandoned, except for an old woman. She was bent and worn from a lifetime of labor, and had remained behind because she could not

keep up with everyone else. But when she saw Weywetzkaiwitl, thin and panting from hunger, she laughed:

"Look at the mighty Warrior who comes begging like a stray dog! Now at last you see the wisdom of the farmers: take what the land can give, and you may live there forever. Take more than it can give, and you will starve in a few short years. You have eaten all your seeds and now have nothing to plant--all seeds except me! But I am too old and weak to work. You must work the fields that you have tortured, and suffer the Earth's pain to restore them. Your blood and sweat shall be the rain that quenches their thirst! You have one more chance, Weywetzkaiwitl--if you will work, I can teach you. Otherwise, you die."

Weywetzkaiwitl bowed to her wisdom, and did as she said. He suffered bitterly in the fields to restoring them to life, and in time food grew again. When other raiders came, he drove them away and protected what grew. From that day forward, Shorn Ones have fought to defend the people rather than prey

on them, to ask from the land rather than take from it, to bear pain rather than inflict it on others. Their resolve serves the Empire well--they are the defenders on the battlefield, the ones who hold ground and never fall back.

CREED OF THE SHORN ONES

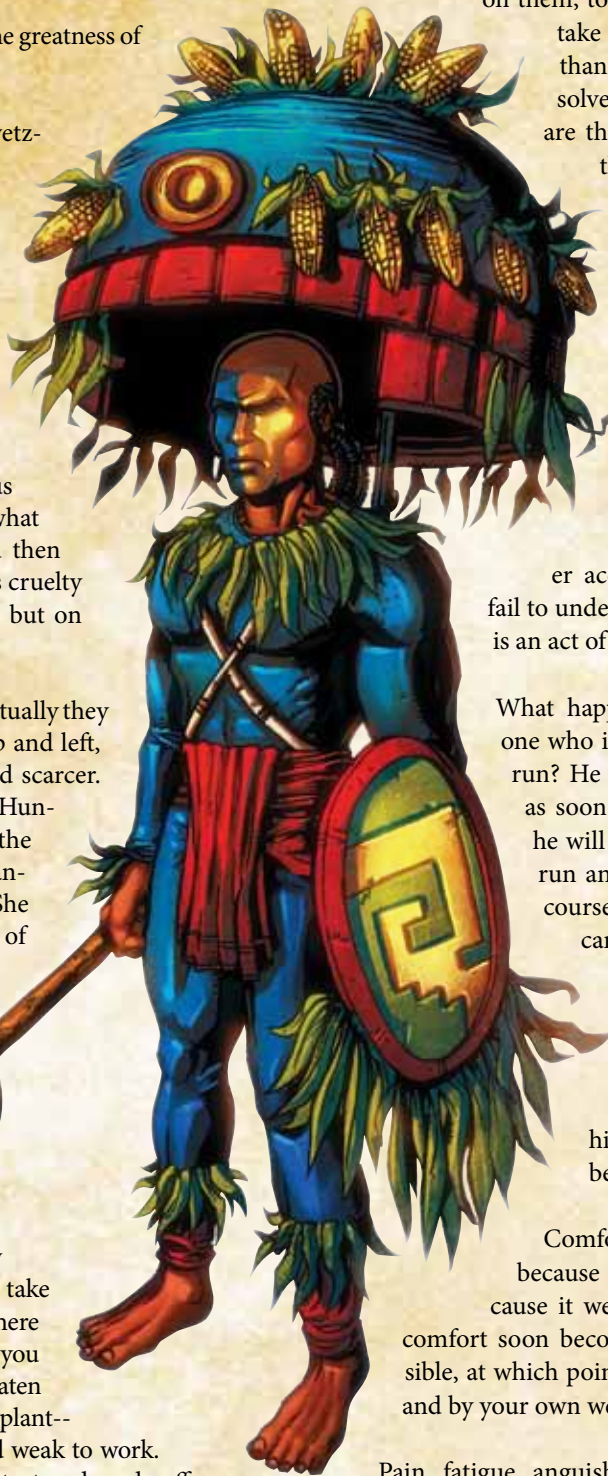
Humans are much stronger than they believe themselves to be. Our bodies can endure terrible hardships and deprivation, and our spirits can overcome the deepest despair. But most of us never access this strength because we fail to understand its true nature: Strength is an act of Will.

What happens when you ask someone one who is unaccustomed to running to run? He will jog for a short while, but as soon as he starts breathing heavily he will stop and claim that he cannot run any further. This is nonsense, of course. What he means is that he cannot *comfortably* run any further. If he were pursued by a pack of hungry wolves, he could run 100 times as far. And if they finally caught him, it would not be because his body gave out. It would be because his Will ran out.

Comfort is a dangerous thing, not because it weakens our bodies, but because it weakens our Will. The limits of comfort soon become the limits of what is possible, at which point you will be ruled by excuses and by your own weakness.

Pain, fatigue, anguish, and humiliation--these will show you just how strong you are, just how much you can endure and still survive. To one who has never felt it, even minor pain is crippling. But bruises mean nothing to you when you have walked on broken legs. To one who has never been humiliated, the mere threat of disapproval will stop you before you start. But jeering crowds mean nothing to you when you have been truly humbled.

Only through suffering can we learn our true strength.



TRAINING

People spend much of their lives preparing for war. Even those who go on to other occupations grow up playing at war. They imitate their older relatives, they listen attentively to their stories, and they dream of becoming famous Warriors. Consequently, even though formal military training doesn't begin until around age 15 at school, most children are already familiar with war and know what expectations will be placed upon them.

Boys at the Telpochkali spend at least half their time training for war, and those who show an aptitude spend even more. Girls have the opportunity to study fighting, but it is not pushed upon them. They learn the basics, but only those who show exceptional interest and aptitude go on to train full time. Kalmekak students are similarly divided, but with increased emphasis on knowledge and leadership--most boys train to become generals, while most girls study to become Priests.

Basic military training comes from recent graduates, many of whom are only a few years older than some of the students. They teach how to fight with and without a weapon, how to fight individually and as part of a unit, how to kill, and also how to capture. Students practice with blunt padded weapons at first so they learn to swing hard and true, but soon advance to training with real weapons. The Telpochkali and Kalmekak are some of the only places where weapons are available during peacetime.

In addition to fighting, students also learn the discipline and values necessary for warfare. They perform grueling physical tasks such as hauling fire wood, digging canals, repairing buildings, and so on. These tasks strengthen their bodies and also instill a sense of civic pride and duty. One of the most important parts of war is having something worthwhile to fight for, after all, and soldiers fight much harder when fighting for a community they built with their own hands.

As they grow older, students begin to accompany the army on campaigns. They are strictly observers during battle, but on the march they carry provisions and equipment and perform small tasks like setting up camp. This teaches them endurance and wilderness survival skills. It also gives them a chance to watch and learn from the experienced Warriors and make friends and contacts among them. These contacts are very important for those students who wish to become elite Warriors someday.

Finally, when the students are old and strong enough, they go to war as full soldiers. They are equipped and supplied as a Masewal soldier and sent into battle in groups of five. Their primary task is to take an enemy captive--until they succeed, they are not considered adults. Their performance during this time largely determines what happens to them.

Those who take a captive single-handedly or who otherwise distinguish themselves may gain the attention of elite Warriors who will take them on and sponsor them for membership in a

Warrior House. Those who perform adequately but not exceptionally graduate from school and take up some other profession. This is by far the most common result.

Those who fail to take a captive are not permitted to graduate. They may try again in the next war, but until then they suffer the scorn of their community. They may try a total of three times to gain a captive. If they fail three times, their heads are shaved and they are kicked out of school. They may try to return to their Household, but many families will disown such failures. Even those who are allowed to return will never marry and likely never amount to anything. They will most likely end up as beggars.

Those who wish to continue in the study of war will need to find an elite Warrior who will agree to take them on as a sort of squire. During this time the squire serves the Warrior faithfully, carrying his things, maintaining his equipment, looking after his captives, setting up his tent, and so on. In exchange, the squire receives personalized training. Few Warriors do this for free, however, so the squire's Household must offer the Warrior compensation--the more famous the Warrior, the higher the price.

Once the Warrior feels that the squire is ready, he will approach the leaders of his Warrior House and ask them to admit the young squire. If the leaders are willing, they permit the squire to undertake a series of ordeals to prove his dedication and abilities. Each House requires different tasks--the Jaguar Warriors require their applicants to help a community of strangers for a month without being seen, the Screaming Ones require the applicants to venture into the Desert to defeat a fearsome enemy and return with proof, and so on.

Once all these tasks are completed, the applicant must go before the idol of the House's ancestor-god founder and beg for acceptance. This is the point of no return, for the location of each House's idol is a closely guarded secret. Once the student comes before it, he must either earn its acceptance or die at the hands of the other members. If the ancestor-god approves, he will send an unmistakable sign of his acceptance. If he disapproves, he will remain silent (and the applicant will die).

Applicants who are accepted immediately becomes full members of the Warrior House and elite Warriors of the Empire. They are permitted to wear their hair in the House style, wear fine clothing and sandals, wear the House's costume on the battlefield, and embrace all the privileges and responsibilities of Warrior status.

"A BREEZE IN MY EAR"

Young Tezkakoatl (Reflecting Serpent) frowned fiercely, his youthful features cracking like an old cliff face. His eyes were fixed on the practice target, focused with all the desperation of a starving predator eying its next meal. But it was not hunger that drove Tezkakoatl. It was pride.





"I have to hit this!" he told himself, his thoughts burning him like hot coals. "I've missed too many already!" He grit his teeth, inhaled sharply, and hurled the atlatl dart with all his might.

There was a loud thunk as the dart slipped off the wooden spur, and then a sharp crack as the atlatl struck the side of the dart, splitting it in two. He had messed it up again!

Tezkakoatl flung the atlatl to the ground in bitter frustration. Angry tears streamed down from his eyes, and his little hands clenched so tightly the knuckles turned white. As he let out a sobbing shout, his atlatl struck a rock, causing it to crack severely, almost completely in half. He gasped as he realized what he had done, and then looked up fearfully to his teacher. That atlatl had been a gift, a gift given to him for passing his first marksmanship test! At last, he dropped to the ground, resigned to the beating he was sure would follow.

His teacher, a young man named Matlal, newly married and boasting a prominent scar from his first battle last year, caught him as he sank and hauled him back up onto his feet. Tezkakoatl refused to meet his eye.

He was so embarrassed. Only a year ago he had been the best in his whole class with the atlatl. Now he couldn't even throw a single dart!

The last ten shots he'd tried had come off the spur and hadn't gone more than a few paces! And he had never split a dart before—he used to make fun of children who made that mistake!

"I can't do it anymore! Let me go back to the Telpochkali!"

Matlal looked down at him sternly and said "You're not going anywhere like this, Tezkakoatl! Now, settle down before I have old Neli give you a thrashing!"

Tezkakoatl squeezed his eyes shut and forced himself to breathe slower, unclenching and opening his hands, and eventually he felt his racing heart begin to slow. When he opened his eyes again, he found that he was calm, though still sad and embarrassed at his failure.

"Much better! Now, what have you learned today?"

For a moment Tezkakoatl felt the fire inside rising up again at what he perceived as a patronizing and insulting question. But he forced himself to answer coolly.

"I learned that I am not as good with the atlatl as I thought I was. I have learned humility, teacher."

"Humility? I'm afraid not," replied Matlal, a faint smile crossing his lips. "That is a lesson for a later day. To learn true humility you will have to go through much more than simply looking foolish in front of your classmates. Try getting married! Now, what else did you learn?"

"I learned that I have to prepare more diligently for the tests that

life presents. I have learned that I must work harder, teacher."

"I've been watching you all day, Tezkakoatl, and you've been trying very hard. Harder than any of the other students, in fact. But they could all throw their darts, and you could not. I'm afraid that's not it, either."

"Then I guess I learned nothing!" snarled Tezkakoatl, losing his tenuous grip on his temper again. Matlal could be so infuriating sometimes"

Matlal smiled kindly, his eyes softening at the genuine emotion coming from his young pupil. It had not been so very long since he himself had been the frustrated student, struggling to understand why everything wasn't as easy as the adults made it look. He thought back to those confusing days, took a deep breath, and repeated the words that his teacher had told him:

"Pupil, what is the name of the eagle who flies over our city?"

"His name is Zipaktonal. He's one of the sons of Ehekamitotiani."

"Have you ever watched how he flies?"

"Yes."

"He makes it look easy, doesn't he?"

"Of course it's easy for him! He's the son of a god!"

"It's easy for him because he has learned not to fight the wind that carries him," said Matlal soothingly. "My, this child is hot headed!"

"The wind is his friend. It rushes up and lifts him into the sky, carrying him to and fro so he can look down on the world and keep us safe. He doesn't demand things of the wind—after all, the wind belongs to his father, and it is not the place of sons to demand things of their fathers. He doesn't try to defeat the wind and make it his slave, it could break his neck against a cliff face if it wanted to! Instead, he opens his arms wide in friendship, and the wind embraces him and carries him to the greatest heights!"

Tezkakoatl wiped the tears from his eyes as he listened. He glanced upwards, and, as if to drive the point home, he saw Zipaktonal soaring up in the sky, his wings stretched wide, effortlessly gliding atop the wind rising from beneath him.

"You have wind within you as well, pupil. The breath in your lungs, the grace in your movements, your voice—all these things are blowing through and around you, like the wind in the sky. A year ago, you simply let them blow. You did not expect to do well. You just did. But now you are expecting it. Your ambition is trying to make the wind inside of you its slave. It is like fire burning beneath you, causing your wind to become harsh and choppy. Have you ever seen an eagle flying over a burning field? His flight is not so effortless, I assure you."



Tezkakoatl smiled and nodded, feeling the earnestness and sincerity of his teacher soothe his aching ego and wash away his embarrassment.

"You must set aside your ambition. You must let the wind inside you blow. Your wind will carry your atlatl darts to where they need to go. Fire and ambition have their uses, and we will learn those soon enough. But fire will not make an Eagle fly high, nor will it make your darts fly straight. Quite simply, you are overthrowing. Now, pick up that atlatl!"

"But it's broken, teacher." Tezkakoatl knelt down and picked up the cracked tool. It had not been split completely. The crack split along the grain, running diagonally across the handle, but the two shards were still connected by a small bit of unbroken, fibrous wood.

"It certainly is. And I want you to keep it, as a reminder of this lesson, and of the harm that fire and ambition can cause when you let them consume you. You may use my atlatl to continue practicing." With that, Matlal plucked his own bone atlatl from his hip cloth and passed it down to young Tezkakoatl, along with another dart.

*Tezkakoatl beamed and excitedly nocked the dart onto the spur of the atlatl. He looked out onto the target range and closed his eyes for a moment, feeling the breeze blow past his face and around his legs and imagining it lifting him off the ground. He opened his eyes, sighted onto the target, and as he threw he exhaled, slowly and evenly. The dart flew pure and perfect through the air with a sharp *ēzipi* sound and struck the very center of the target.*

Matlal smiled at his young pupil's success, and glanced fondly up towards the Sun setting to the west. "Thank you, my old teacher!" he whispered to the breeze, imagining it carrying his words up to the House of the Sun, to the ears of the old warrior who had died in the same battle where Matlal had earned his scar. "Your words were but a breeze in my ear, but they have become a pure and singing wind, carrying the darts of tomorrow's Warriors!"

HOW PEOPLE FIGHT

Warfare in Semanawak drifts somewhere between tactics and ritual. Intricate maneuvers and careful strategy are important, but the most glorious form of combat is the straight-up fight. To win through ambush or the precise cutting of supply lines grants victory, but little glory. Such tactics are acceptable for smaller engagements, but the decisive battle must be a pitched struggle between the armies in order to gain the attention of the gods.

LEADERSHIP DURING WAR

The armies of the Empire are huge, and they require an intricate chain of command to manage.

The Wey Tlatoani is the Supreme General of the Empire. He

holds ultimate authority over military and diplomatic matters. He may start wars, appoint or dismiss lesser generals and commanders as he sees fit, and generally do whatever he likes with the army. Only the greatest, most noble Warriors have a chance of being elected Wey Tlatoani. He is, by definition, the greatest Warrior in the Empire.

The Wey Tlatoani traditionally concerns himself more with tactical leadership than with larger strategies and planning. He fights on the battlefield at the head of the army alongside his men so he can physically lead them to victory. The tactics of the battle are considered more prestigious than the tedious strategic scheming that precedes it, and therefore they tend to receive more of the Wey Tlatoani's attention.

If he wishes, the Wey Tlatoani may instead appoint a field general known as a Tlakatekutli (War Lord) to lead the battle. This allows him to focus more on the bigger picture, or to avoid smaller and less glorious engagements. He may do this as a favor to allow the appointee to earn glory and reknown- Wey Tlatoani's often appoint their sons, lesser Tlatoanis, or others they want to aid politically. Alternatively, he may appoint someone else to avoid the shame of losing if the battle is hopeless. Loyal generals may even volunteer to lose on their Tlatoani's behalf to spare him the embarrassment.

Beneath the Wey Tlatoani or Tlakatekutli is the Supreme War Council, which is headed by four officials in charge of the four departments of the army. Each official is responsible for a different aspect of the war effort and for assisting the Wey Tlatoani or Tlakatekutli in any way required.

First, there is the Tlakatekkatl (He Who Commands Warriors). He is responsible for many of the more esoteric strategic decisions that precede the battles. He must investigate the terrain, locate the enemy, identify possible traps, brief the Wey Tlatoani on the possible outcomes, and often choose the actual site for battle.

Next is the Tlakochkalkatl (He of the House of Darts). He is in charge of securing supplies and equipment for the army, both before and during the war, and distributing them where they are needed. Weapons, armor, food, medicine, and other crucial items fall under his control. Consequently, he is a person of tremendous influence and power in the Empire. Everybody offers him favors in hopes of gaining his favor (and the materials he controls). The Wey Tlatoani must be careful who he appoints to this position, for it is highly prone to corruption.

Next is the Etzwawanikatl (He from the Place Where One has Scratched With Blood). This position always goes to the most senior Warrior in the army. He is in charge of looking after moral and personnel, mustering troops, resolving disputes between units and officers, and keeping peace and order in the ranks. There are countless tribes and factions within the Empire, and uniting them into a cohesive force takes constant effort.





Finally, there is the Tlilankalkwi (Keeper of the Dark House). This office is held by a female Priest or Nawal Sorcerer who serves as the spiritual and magical leader of the army. She leads the Priests and ensures that they perform all necessary rituals and heed all important omens. She also works to support the army magically, making use of sorcery and the powers of the gods while also protecting everyone against the magic of the enemy.

Beneath the Supreme War Council are a variety of lesser officers who lead progressively smaller units, from the 8,000 man xikwipilli unit all the way down to the 20 man squads at the bottom. One of the most important units, however, is the Kalpuli.

In addition to being a social and religious unit, the Kalpuli is also a military one. Soldiers from the same Kalpuli fight together, under the command of officers from their Kalpuli. They fly community banners and earn glory for their Kalpuli when they fight well. This means that, no matter how far from home war takes you, you are always fighting alongside friends, family, and neighbors. Your home literally travels with you. This creates incredibly effective and cohesive units and makes cowardice and desertion virtually unheard of, since few can bear to abandon their kin. Of course, the flipside is that there are constant rivalries between units from different Kalpultin.

THE ARMY MARCHES

Moving an army across Semanawak is no small task. It takes a great deal of planning and coordination. Minor obstacles become insurmountable when you have to move thousands of men over them.

The army rarely assembles en masse until just before battle. Instead, each Altepetl breaks up into small Kalpuli units who each take their own route to the battlefield. Each unit has its own unique journey to the battlefield, its own unique story. This reduces the stress on the landscape and on villages along the way, who are required to provide food for traveling soldiers. However, it also means that each unit must fend for itself and find its own way.

Ambushes and skirmishes are common during these marches, as is getting lost. Difficult terrain, problems with local spirits, internal disputes, and all manner of similar problems are to be expected. Therefore, flexibility and individual discretion are very important for a unit commander.

After navigating all these hazards, the units meet and assemble at the planned battlefield to engage the main enemy forces.

BATTLE

Battles usually begin around dawn. The armies form up into a succession of long lines with elite Warriors and Priests in the front and Masewal soldiers in back. Both sides exchange battle cries and vicious threats to intimidate each other and gain an edge. The Priests call upon their gods and demonstrate their strength through magic. The sound of an entire army display-

ing on the eve of battle is absolutely terrifying.

Eventually, one side sounds the charge using conch shell trumpets. The front lines then race towards each other while archers and slingers on either side shoot volleys into the fray. Soldiers of the front lines may carry atlats and other short range weapons which they use to break up the enemy line, but the priority is to close the distance quickly.

The impact of the charging lines is tremendous. Shields crack and shatter, spears break, and combatants are knocked unconscious. The lines then drift into countless smaller engagements as the Warriors struggle against each other and try to break up the enemy formation.

Battles are extremely bloody and last for a long time. Warriors switch off periodically to ensure that those at the front are always fresh. Priests call down the power of the gods and pummel the other side with powerful magic. The wounded are pulled back by acolytes to be healed. Orders are relayed through drums, but commanders in particularly large battles also use smoke signals to reach more distant regions.

Different Warrior Houses each have different objectives during battles. Screaming Ones lead the charge and seek to penetrate enemy lines and create holes for others to exploit. Eagle Warriors are next, bravely leading incursions into enemy territory. Shorn Ones move in to fortify territory--once committed to a position, Shorn Ones vow to die before taking a single step back. Lastly, Jaguar Warriors prowl around the flanks looking for ways to turn the tide or rush past and strike more vulnerable positions behind.

Masewaltin assistant and young student drag captives subdued by the Warriors back behind their lines and tie them up. Once an enemy is tied up, the capturing Warrior cuts the hair from the top of his head and keep it. A Warrior's pride and Light is in his hair, and by taking it the captor takes spiritual as well as physical possession of the captive.

Once one side's lines have crumbled, another charge is sounded, and the reserves of Masewal soldiers move in to overwhelm the crippled enemy. This is the point where the majority of captives are taken. Warriors and Masewaltin alike fall upon the retreating enemy, subduing them and binding them to be taken back and sacrificed at the temples. For most Masewaltin this is the only chance to claim captives and gain glory.

ONE ON ONE COMBAT

Once the front lines close with each other, the battle breaks down into countless one-on-one fights between elite Warriors. Warriors meet and challenge each other, and while they must always be wary for treachery it is assumed that others will not intrude once two Warriors have engaged. This is the honorable way to fight, for it ensures a fair match and also makes it much easier to take captives.





The Warriors still maintain a strong formation, however, for each side continues to launch attacks on weak sections of the lines. The situation becomes confusing quickly--attackers try to avoid getting involved in existing fights, but if the defender engages multiple attackers, it is not clear who has "rights" to that fight.

Disputes over captives are common, and Priests are in charge of mediating these disputes. Some disputes are inevitable and simply result from the chaos of battle. But others are caused by less scrupulous Warriors trying to steal captives (particularly when rival Kalpultin or Warrior Houses are involved). Some even result when well-meaning Warriors try to rescue their friends from defeat. It doesn't matter--as soon as two Warriors strike the same opponent, there is a dispute (and your friend will probably be very angry with you).

Masewal soldiers rarely adhere to such honorable rules. They prefer to swarm and overwhelm opponents and find safety (and courage) in numbers. Professional Warriors sneer at such cowardice, but considering that most elite Warriors can easily defeat up to five Masewal soldiers at once, perhaps it is not cowardice, but simply common sense.

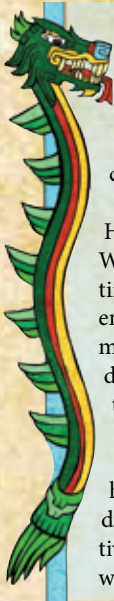
VICTORY

Once the battle is lost, most enemy Altepetls quickly surrender and offer tribute. Particularly proud enemies might refuse, but the longer they wait the more menthey lose and the more tribute they will have to pay (because their bargaining position is weaker). Mortal enemies may fight to the death, in which case the battle continues into the urban center.

If a city is invaded, the attackers rush to reach the Sacred Precinct at the center to seize the temples and palaces and burn them. They always spare the idols in the temple out of respect for the gods, but when a city can no longer protect its gods in the most heavily fortified center, it is a sign of defeat. If the enemy still refuses to yield, the attackers raze the city and burn it to the ground.

This almost never happens, however. By surrendering and offering tribute, an Altepetl saves itself from destruction and also give the victors an interest in helping them rebuild, in order to get a better return on their tribute. Only the most barbarous and vengeful attackers will continue killing and destroying a city that has surrendered, and they suffer major diplomatic consequences as a result.





WAVE UPON WAVE

What is the honorable thing to do if five Warriors come upon a single enemy Warrior? If they all attack at once they will look like cowards and also end up in a victory dispute. But it would be foolish for them to completely abandon their advantage of numbers.

Honor dictates a form of fighting known as Wave Upon Wave. The attackers fall into a line and attack one at a time in succession--the first in line makes a pass at the enemy, then steps aside and allows the second in line to make a pass, and so on. This makes the fight fair for the defender, who only has to worry about one enemy at a time, while also preserving the honor of the attackers.

The attacker who succeeds in subduing the defender has rights to the captive. If the defender is able to subdue an attacker and seize him by the hair, he gains a captive and the remaining attackers are expected to let him withdraw.

TRIBUTE

Tribute unites the Altepetls of Semanawak. It is tax, protection money, and a gesture of great respect all at once. It can result from oppression or from reverence, and usually from a strange mixture of both.

Direct political conquest is a foreign concept in Semanawak.

The very idea of the Altepetl as a unified community precludes it--the rulers of an Altepetl are connected to their people, and vice versa. Foreign rulers do not have this connection, and therefore there is no basis for their rule.

The people would either disperse, leaving the conquerors with nothing but a ghost town, or they would rebel and force the conquerer to fight a costly and never ending war just to hold on. It's simply not worth it.

Therefore, when an Altepetl is conquered, its Tlatoani is almost always left in charge (or replaced by a local successor if he or she died during the conquest). The local government is left intact so that it may rebuild and pay abundant tribute. It may continue to trade with others (trade is often stimulated by tribute demands), hold its own religious festivals, worship its own gods, and generally live without further interference. Tribute allows dominance without destruction or upheaval.

This custom is backed by ages of tradition in Semanawak, and those who deviate from it face stern disapproval. This is one of the reasons why the Kakayawani were expelled. The Kakayawani asked not just for tribute but for cultural submission as well. They imposed their gods on others and overthrew local rulers even when they offered tribute for the right to keep ruling. In the end, this caused such ill-will that their subjects united against them and drove them away.

Tribute is usually imposed through war, but some offer it willingly to avoid a war, to gain membership in the Empire's trade

network, or even out of sheer admiration. An Altepetl struggling in the midst of drought or infertility might offer tribute to the Empire so that Empire Priests will restore the favor of the gods and bring prosperity.

This is an important point: there is no shame in submitting to a superior foe. Pride sometimes drives people and Altepetls to fight even when they are beaten, but there is a sort of quiet pride that comes from surrendering to a famously fierce foe. For instance, everybody knows that the Tonalteka are supremely powerful. Losing to them is expected, and the fact that an Altepetl resists at all earns it prestige -- "We pay tribute to none but the People of Light, for only they could defeat our greatest Warriors!"

The flipside of this, however, is that tribute is based on awe and perceived superiority. So long as the conquerer maintains an image of dominance, subjects will continue to pay tribute. But if the conquerer shows weakness, the subjects will rebel and possibly try to extract tribute from *them*.

CAPTIVES

The most straightforward reason Warriors take captives is because it earns them rank and prestige. The more captives a Warrior takes, the greater his rank. One captive is the minimum for a man to be considered an adult. Three or four captives is needed to become an elite Warrior. Five to ten indicates a seasoned veteran. Eleven to fifteen is often enough to become a Tlatokay and earn a command position. More than fifteen makes one eligible for an Imperial command position, membership on the Supreme War Council, and possibly even a chance at becoming a Tlatoani.

However, it is not just the number of captives one takes. Worthiness of the captives is also a factor. A Warrior who takes an enemy Tlatoani captive earns more than one who captures 20 Masewal soldiers. The enemies of different regions are also "valued" differently--the Maiteka of the Eastern Crescent are far less prestigious captives than the Kakayawani, for instance.

In addition, only truly worthy captives--enemy elite Warriors or better -- "count" past five captives. The veteran Warrior who takes large numbers of Masewal soldiers captive may earn favor among the Priests, but he will not gain increased military rank. The Tlatoani, or a duly appointed officer, ultimately decides how much credit to give for a captive, and offers awards and accolades according to this judgement.

The second reason Warriors take captives is religion. The gods require sacrifices to survive, and humans require the favor and power of the gods to survive. Therefore, Warriors support society and prove their faith by offering captives. But it is not enough to simply knock someone out and hand him over to the Priests. A captive is only worthy of sacrifice if he is strong, brave, and if people weep for him. Just as offering rotten food to a guest insults the guest, offering a maimed, broken, and unmourned wretch insults the gods.





Taking a captive is difficult and dangerous, which is precisely why it grants such prestige to those who succeed. You must subdue a person who is trying to kill or capture you without injuring him permanently, and then grasp and cut the hair off the top of his head (which you must keep with you until the sacrifice). Any sort of maiming or permanent injury renders a captive unworthy for sacrifice. He must be capable of climbing the stairs of the pyramid to meet his fate.

After taking the captive, you must care for him. If he was injured you must do what it takes to heal him. You must also ensure that his spirit remains strong, because he must be brave when he faces the altar. If he breaks down from fear, he will be judged unworthy and it will reflect very poorly upon his captor. And even if you manage to sneak a coward past the Priests and onto the sacrifice stone, the gods can see the true nature of a person's heart. They will reject an unworthy offering, and your deception will be known to all.

A properly spirited captive should try to escape at least once--dismal resignation indicates that his spirit is broken. However, a captive who merely runs away shows cowardice, not spirit. In order to truly be free, a captive must recover the lock of hair you took from him when you captured him. He may use any and all means to do this--Force, stealth, trickery, deception. Ultimately it is your responsibility to keep it safe. If he manages to escape with his hair, it proves that you only captured him through luck. If you are able to stop him, it reaffirms that he is yours.

It is inevitable that you and your captive will grow close during your time together. This closeness only grows as the time of sacrifice approaches. Depending on the circumstances, the sacrifice might occur soon after his capture or it might occur many years later. Regardless, you must prepare him to meet his end. You must keep him strong and healthy, help him train for the ritual, provide him with any clothes or equipment he needs, teach him anything that he does not already know (speeches, dances, and so on), and help him overcome any fear he feels. For many Warriors, captives become some of their closest, most valued friends.

This closeness ensures that, no matter what, somebody mourns him when he is dead. Tears and sadness are very important to the gods, both because they symbolize rain and fertility and also because they prove that something of value was given. The reason humans are offered as sacrifices is because human life is the most valuable thing the people of Earth possess. If life is not valued, then it is not a sacrifice. The real substance of the sacrifice is not the blood or the heart of the victim, but the strength of his bonds and relationships with others.

When women bear children, those children are referred to as "their little captives." When Warriors take captives during war, they refer to them as "their honored sons." Birth is the female equivalent of war, and war is the male equivalent of birth.

RETURN FROM WAR

When a war results in victory, the homecoming is glorious. Kalpultin welcome their returning Warriors with tremendous joy, and mourn those who perished in the fight. Any captives are prepared for sacrifice. It is customary to offer at least some sacrifices immediately after the war, but most are kept for future rituals.

Warriors and soldiers who distinguished themselves are richly rewarded by their Tlatoani. They receive official praise as well as lavish gifts of clothing and jewelry to represent that praise. They are also permitted to dine in the palace with the Tlatokay. And if they offered a sacrifice, they may take part in a most sacred meal, where the flesh of the sacrifice is eaten. This is a tremendously powerful experience, for it signifies the captor becoming one with the captive.

If the war ends in defeat, the return is harrowing and miserable. Enemies pursue defeated attackers for a long while and claim captives, ensuring that the cost of defeat is as high as possible. Particularly bold defenders might chase them all the way back to the attackers' city and mount their own attack!

The shame and disappointment of defeat eats at the spirits of those remaining. There is no glorious reception, no royal praise or rewards. There may be punishments for those whose failures lead to the defeat. There may even be coups, overthrows, and internal battles. War is the responsibility of the Tlatoani, after all, and a defeated Tlatoani is extremely vulnerable to ambitious rivals.



WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

MELEE WEAPONS

Hand-to-hand combat is the most glorious way to fight in Semanawak. It allows combatants to test their skill and courage in the most unforgiving of settings, and it also enables them to take captives. Elite Warriors may soften an opponent up at a distance, but they always close to melee to finish the job.

MAKWAWITL

A Makwawitl is a fearsome weapon that resembles a flat wooden cricket bat with rows of razor sharp obsidian blades along each edge. The blades are fixed in place with bitumen and turtle dung glue, and may be placed flush with each other to create a continuous edge, or spaced out to create a jagged, saw-like edge.

Makwawitls come in a variety of sizes and styles. Most are designed for one-handed use, which allows the Warrior to use a shield in the other hand. However, there are also terrifying two-handed varieties available, some of which are as tall as a full grown man.

Side to side slashes are the most common way to use a makwawitl, but it is capable of inflicting severe wounds with





underhand and backhand strokes as well. One of the most effective techniques is the drag slash, where the Warrior wraps the weapon around the back of his opponent and then pulls it back, hamstringing him. Most also have blunt tips, so can be used to bludgeon as well as slash.

Makwawitls are very versatile but require a great deal of skill to wield. Their edges are lethally sharp but rather brittle, so the wielder must take care to protect it from contact with other weapons. Therefore, most who use them are elite Warriors who have the time to spend practicing the unique techniques required.

KWOWOLOLI

A Kwowololi consists of a wooden handle topped by a large, round, incredibly hard ball made of wood, stone, or copper. More elaborate kwowolilis might include stone studs, spikes, and other such additions. They vary in size from small one-handed versions to gigantic two-handed ones. Regardless, a kwowololi is always big, heavy, and extremely destructive if brought into contact with anything at sufficient speed.

The most common way to use a kwowololi is to swing it in a series of crushing downward strokes, like a hammer pounding a nail. Skilled users can reduce shields to splinters in relatively short order, but even the unskilled can inflict tremendous damage if they simply connect. The kwowololi is therefore very common among Masewal soldiers who have less time to spend training.

TEPOZTOPILI

A Tepoztopili is a long, halberd-like weapon designed to keep foes at a distance. It has a long wooden haft with a broad leaf-shaped head that is edged by obsidian, much like the makwawitl. It also has a vicious point capable of skewering and ripping apart anyone unfortunate enough to be stabbed.

The obvious advantage of the tepoztopili is its reach. The wielder is able to hold foes back and attack them without exposing himself to danger. Though it loses much of its effectiveness if an opponent manages to get in close, the rear-facing blades on the head allow for a devastating back pull, and the haft can parry, trip, and push opponents with powerful leverage.

OTHERS

In addition to these powerful weapons there are also innumerable others--axes, knives, spears, hooks, and so on. The people of Semanawak are inventive and determined, and frequently make improvements and additions to their equipment.

RANGED WEAPONS

Ranged fire is considered less glorious but far safer than hand-to-hand combat. It is usually left to the Masewal soldiers and considered a supporting role rather than a primary one. In battle, ranks of archers shower arrows and sling stones on the enemy to pick off softer targets and soften up the lines in pre-

paration for a charge by the melee-equipped elite Warriors. They also fire to cover retreats.

Outside of battle, however, ranged weapons are widely used for hunting and are generally considered tools rather than weapons.

ATLATL [SPEAR THROWER]

An Atlatl is a piece of wood or bone used as an aid for throwing flexible-shafted spears (known as Tlakochtli, or Darts). The Atlatl has a handle on one end and a spur on the other. In order to use it the thrower fits the spur into a dimple on the back end of the dart, grasps the handle of the Atlatl, and then casts the dart forward with a snap of the wrist.

The Atlatl essentially adds an extra joint and an additional two feet to the arm of the thrower, which greatly increases his power and leverage. The impact and knock-down ability of an Atlatl dart is much greater than an arrow, even one propelled by a very powerful bow.

For all its awesome power, however, the Atlatl is a rather short ranged weapon. Skilled users can physically throw a dart a long way, but its accuracy and penetrating power drop off significantly at a distance. The darts are also large and unwieldy (usually around 6 ft long), so Warriors can only carry two or three into battle. Therefore, it is usually used to soften the enemy up before charging and closing to hand-to-hand, rather than to engage in prolonged ranged exchanges.

TŁAWITOLI [BOW]

Tławitolis of Semanawak are simple non-recurve bows made from flexible wood and strung with animal sinew. They fire arrows (called Mitl) tipped with obsidian, flint, or fishbone, and use different point types for different tasks--barbed, blunt, sharp point, burning, and so on.

Tławitolis do not have the power of the Atlatl or the distance of the Sling, but they do have an edge in precision. Rather than relying on body motion for power and accuracy, tławitolis engineer these things--if you pull back the string it will spring forward the same way every time. This lets the archer focus more on other elements of accuracy, like lead and drop and wind effects, trusting that the propulsion of the projectile will happen consistently each time.

TEMATLATL [SLING]

A Tematlatl consists of a length of string, usually made from hide or maguey plant fibers. At one end is a small loop, which is placed around the ring finger of the slinger. At the other end is a small knot, which is held between the thumb and index finger of the same hand. In the middle is a pouch or pocket to house the projectile, which can be either a stone or a prepared bullet.

To use it, the slinger whirls the tematlatl in a circle (one circle is enough for skilled slingers, but less skilled ones may take up



to three circles to build up enough speed). When he is ready to throw, he simply lets go of the small knot. This sends the projectile on a straight path at the moment of release at speeds high enough to shatter skulls.

Tematlatls are exceedingly deadly, but are among the simplest of weapons. Even a novice can construct or repair one in under an hour. They also have an extremely long range, much longer than any bow. Their only disadvantage is that they require a lot of practice to develop reliable accuracy. Slingers are often paired up with archers on the battlefield, as the two weapons compliment each other nicely.

DEFENSIVE WEAPONS

CHIMALI [SHIELDS]

The Chimali of Semanawak are round, made of wood or bone or maize cane and covered with thick deerhide. The front is often covered by a layer of feathers as well, both for decoration and additional defense, because feathers are very slippery and good for deflecting or turning aside blows.

Hanging down from the bottom of the chimali is a curtain of long fringe made from feathers or hide strips. Like the feather front, this fringe is both decorative and functional. It obscures the Warrior's legs from view (legs are the favorite target of Warriors seeking captives), entangles weapons that get caught there, and spoils the flight of projectiles that dip beneath the chimali.

ICHKAWIPILI ARMOR

Ichkawipili is made from a thick layer of unspun cotton (usually two or three fingers thick) sewn between two layers of cloth and stitched to a leather border to form a tunic-like protective garment. It is extremely effective, able to cushion against impacts and edges and stop all but the most accurate arrows and atlatl darts. Ichkawipili is very flexible, but it can be hot and tiring to wear.

Cotton can be quite expensive, and therefore ichkawipili is restricted to elite Warriors and high ranking officials. Some of these elites may add additional defenses and decorations to their armor as well--copper studs, wooden or stone plates, and feathers are the most popular.

THE FIVE SUNS LEGEND, PART 3

As told by Teoxiwił (Precious Turquoise), Singing Priestess of Ilwikakalko.

THE SECOND SUN

The gods once again gathered at Tleteoxiwakan, the place where the Second Sun was born, and looked up at Itztechiwani, floating up in the sky where Oleletlel had once been. Her voice boomed across the world like an earthquake, shaking the soot off of the hills and valleys:

"This world needs a new Sun! I am the craftiest and cleverest of us all. It was I who came up with the plan that allowed this world to be made. It was I who, through wits and skill, saved it from Oleletlel's flames. I shall be the new Sun. You may watch as I make this world right!"

And so the gods at Tleteoxiwakan gathered in a circle and gazed up at Itztechiwani floating in the sky, and in an instant she began to glow with an eerie and unsettling green light, bathing the scorched landscape in illumination once again.

Itztechiwani fixed her gaze upon Tleteoxiwakan, and from her hands came rays of rumbling green flame. They struck the ground and could be seen traveling across the land like the waves of an earthquake. They traveled to the middle of the world, and there arose a nation of stone Giants, each as tall as a mountain. Through them ran veins of gold, turquoise, and jade, like the veins that carry blood in the People of today. Their faces were like the immense cliffs, creased and lined with marks of intelligence. Their teeth were barbs of flint. Their fingers were sacred obsidian. From Itztechiwani the Green Sun, the Earth People were born.

PEOPLE OF EARTH

Itztechiwani taught her Earth People many things. She taught them to use their Hands to create wonderful things never seen before. She taught them to use their Minds to plan greater projects--once the Hand learns a skill, the Mind must invent a new one for it to learn. At first the Earth People were clumsy and uncoordinated, like an avalanche tumbling down a mountainside, but she also taught them precision and finesse so they could be Masters, and instilled in them an appreciation for good, hard labor. She taught them these things, and then told them to use these virtues to find meaning and nourish the gods.

And so the Earth People used what they had learned, and built and built and built. They built marvelous works in all known crafts, and even some that have since been forgotten. They built together, and they built as individuals, and everything they built was brilliant. The Earth People filled the world with their works, and in time there was little space that was not filled with some crafted wonder.

They piled them into mountainous stacks, and yet they never found time to use what they created. No sooner did they invent something than they tossed it aside and began something new. From time to time, a pile of inventions would topple down like an avalanche, burying and killing an Earth Person, but in those days this was seen as a good death, to die beneath the weight of your own creations. The Earth People invented the Makwawitl, but what good is a Makwawitl that never fights for glory and the gods?





EMPTY BOWLS, EMPTY HEARTS

The other gods watched the mountainous piles of unused clutter bury their world, and they were sad. Weysitlalin murmured something softly, but no one else heard her, so they assumed she was also sad. Elopataliztli, tearful at the choking and crushing mess the world had become, returned to Tleteoxiwakan and from there leapt up into the sky and flew straight into Itztechiwani's face, blocking out her light and plunging the world into darkness. Elopataliztli pointed down to the world and spoke:

"Look, great Itztechiwani! Your world is choking, your people are dying! They may build for some time yet, but one day they will all be dead, leaving nothing but unused works that will go unused for all the ages of eternity. You people labor skillfully, but their lands are nothing but messes of debris! Invention brings no glory when it smothers the land, when you build and work for no reason other than to build and work some more. Your people are crafters who have broken the world they were made to create. Look, great Itztechiwani!"

But though she looked down at the world, Itztechiwani could not see the truth of Elopataliztli's words. Itztechiwani looked over these pointless works of brilliance, and though the world lay in confusion and meaningless complexity she saw her creations as beautiful, for what parent can see anything else in their children?

THE GREAT FLOOD

And so they fought. Itztechiwani fumbled through her endless pile of masterful weapons, searching for the perfect one. But as she searched Elopataliztli called into her hands a simple club made of a thousand tides and ten thousand waves. She struck Itztechiwani, cracking her shiny obsidian mirror face, and threw her down from the sky. She landed far to the west, scattering shards of precious stones across the land, so many that some still remain this day. That is why the western lands are so full of treasures of the earth.

Elopataliztli then closed her eyes and let her tears well up, and as she wept a tremendous rain fell from the sky. The water spilled over the Earth People and their piles of crafts, a thousand rivers carrying them out to sea, washing them away. Most of them died as Elopataliztli drowned them, but a few, the largest and most innovative Giant-Crafters, remained standing and working, and continue to do so to this day. That is why there are mountains in the world, covered in useful stones for us to harvest, and why sometimes the mountains move, sending shocks throughout the land.

VULTURES LAND

As the Earth People died, Xolokwani slunk across the world and snuck up behind some of the Earth People and knocked them out with a blow to the head. He dragged the immense, craggy bodies and threw them down a deep hole that only he knew of. This hole lead to a secret corner beneath the earth,

down in the Underworld, and after stealing the Earth People Xolokwani returned to Tleteoxiwakan and pretended he was never gone.

Weysitlalin saw what he had done and murmured something softly, but no one else heard her, not even Xolokwani, so they assumed that everything was fine.

RELIGION

It is difficult to say where religion begins and ends in Semanawak. It is both everything and nothing. Everything is sacred and must be treated with respect. But nothing is considered "supernatural." Spirits and gods have powers beyond normal humans, but so do dogs and turkeys. It is all natural. It is all normal. And it is also all religion.

Religion is both an institution, like the temples and Priestly Orders, and also a diffuse range of beliefs that have been around for longer than anybody can remember. There is no single scripture in Semanawak, no definitive story or set of stories that serve as the "official" version. Each Altepetl and even each town has its own tales, customs, and rituals.

That being said, however, there is a substantial amount of overlap between beliefs. For example, everybody's story of the Five Suns is unique, but everybody has a Five Suns story. Everybody has different sacrifice rituals, but everybody has sacrifice rituals. The people of the Empire attribute this to the Ancient Tonalteka Empire--the practices of today are people picking up the shards of the shattered ancients. But that doesn't necessarily explain why some of these beliefs extend all across Semanawak...

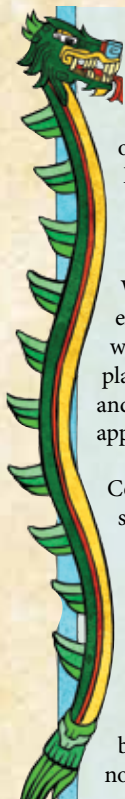
In discussing these beliefs, we will be trying to establish broad themes that are widely shared across the Empire and Semanawak. However, you may safely assume that this is just the beginning. There will always more to discover--more gods, more spirits, more beliefs, more truths.



"The universe is a place of infinite rivers flowing. It is the Great River. Rain falls from the sky onto the peaks of the mountains, flows down the mountain slopes, and arrives in the Lake. The Water of the Lake dies and flows as fog back into the sky, only to fall again as rain. The Great River changes form--first it is rain, then it is flowing streams, then it is stagnant Lake, then it is rising mist--but in all forms it is ever flowing, ever moving, and ever changing. So long as water dies, there will be rain. So long as it rains, water will die."

--Kozamalotl (Rainbow),
Corn Priestess of Mixiwilztlán





"We humans possess a Will, a consciousness, and we spend our lives using and understanding this will. But we are not the only things that have wills in this universe. There is a will behind all things. The will of water is to flow, the will of fire is to burn, the will of Eagles is to fly, and the will of Jaguars is to prowl. Do you suppose these things spend any less time thinking and trying to understand their place than we do?"

What so few of us understand is that different creatures exist in different times. A human who awakens and works during the day obviously possesses a will--she plants and harvests, she grinds and sews, and she cooks and eats. But a sleeping human is comatose and inert, and appears to possess no more will than a rock.

Could it be that the rocks we see are not inert, but simply sleeping?

What so few of us understand is that different creatures face in different directions. A human who speaks to you face-to-face is alive and animate and full of thoughts and ideas. You can see her smiles and her frowns, understand all the subtle movements of her eyes, and feel a sense of connection and kinship. But if she turns her back to you, she is confusing, aloof, and distant. You cannot hear her well. You cannot connect.

Could it be that the animals we see are not thoughtless, but simply facing another direction?

What a wonder it would be to dream the dreams that rocks dream, to see the sights that animals see! This is, I think, the true will of humans--to understand."

--Kwikatochtli (Singing Rabbit), Tlamatini of Tlatlahako

STRUCTURE OF THE UNIVERSE

THE SKIES

The Skies are the region of stars, Sun, wind, and rain. They exist in many layers and are home to a variety of gods and spirits. They are places of great light and wonder but there are also dark corners, places where fearsome beings dwell and plot the destruction of Earth.

The Skies are not always completely distinct from the Earth. Mountains stick up into the Skies like ladders, while certain meteorological and astrological events (such as comets, falling stars, and sometimes even clouds) represent the descent of certain Skies down to Earth.

The Skies are the ultimate homeland of the gods. Even those who live on or beneath the Earth today were originally born from the house of Teomochi in the very highest Sky, beyond the stars and beyond time itself. Though some speak of things that existed on Earth before their arrival, all that exists today was originally born of the Skies.

Certain gods still remain in the Skies--Ehekamitotiani, Elopaltiztli, Weysitlalin, and Xolokwani are some of the most fa-

mous. Their houses lie somewhere up in the expanses. There are also a multitude of spirits that fly in the great spaces above the Earth--Eagles and other birds of prey, Vultures, Bats, Owls, Storm spirits, and the endless variety of creatures who dwell atop the clouds.

The Skies are home to the honored dead. Those brave and bright enough to pass through the Underworld unscathed join with the Sun and go on to dwell in the Skies. Brave Warriors and Mothers escort the Sun daily, or flit about between Skies and Earth as Hummingbirds to feed on beautiful flowers and nectar.

The Skies change a great deal between Night and Day, however. During the day they are bright and full of color and song. But at night these creatures transform into true horrors that hover above like some great swarm just beyond the light. They coil about and between the stars like worms. They sweep down upon the heads of the people below, heard but unseen. Some, like the Kamazotz and Tekolote, have names. Others do not, and are known only by the word Tzitzimime (Star Demons).

Above all else, the Skies are a place of extremes. They are the source of the greatest beauty, and the most maddening terror.

THE EARTH

The world of Semanawak occupies this level. It is home to humans and all the familiar components of every day life. Though Earth is the level that most concerns humans, it is not necessarily the emphasis of the entire universe. Quite the contrary, actually.

Semanawak is a passageway, a place through which things travel on their way to other destinations. It is pierced by tunnels to other realms and studded with pieces of them. It is a place where many things happen. But it is also a place where nothing remains for long.

If there is any one thing that defines Earth, it is Change.

"Do we really live on Earth? We are not on Earth forever. We are only here for a little while."

--Nezawalkoyotl of Texkoko (Real World)

THE UNDERWORLD

Every storyteller has his or her own concept of the Underworld. The landscape, the trials, and the beings one meets differ from story to story. This leads many to believe that each person's perceptions of the Underworld are unique and shaped by his or her personal beliefs and fears. Others maintain that the Underworld is constantly shifting and changing according to the bored whims of Nakoyomiketl, the god of the dead who rules this dismal place.

However, one must remember that stories are told for benefit of the living. In truth, nobody living knows the paths that the dead walk, or the stories they tell. Living storytellers may see glimpses in their dreams, and may speak with the whispers of





spirits in their ears, but their words are mere echoes of some distant cavern.

Regardless of the details, however, there are some things that are known without question.

The Underworld is a land of darkness and gloom. It is under the ground, and so contains the darkness of caves and caverns and the creatures who live beneath the Earth. It is a place of rot and decay, for all the dead who are buried and burned end up there. It is known as the Land of the Fleshless, for all who go there are said to lose their skin, leaving it behind like life itself. Those who walk the Underworld are skeletons, and any light they bring with them glows from inside their skulls.

The Underworld is a place of journeying. It is the reverse of life and birth. The dead are travelers working towards an ultimate destination, and on the way they must endure many trials. Some storytellers speak of a wide river they must cross, where many terrible creatures lurk. Others speak of something called the Wind of Razors, a gale that carries countless shards of obsidian to flay the travelers. Still others mention a Place Where Flags Wave somewhere in the depths.

The Underworld is also home to many other creatures. The Fire People who were buried following the age of the Red Sun live on, waging endless war as great magma flows and jets of fire. The Jaws of Sipaktli live on as well, given gruesome life by the ennui-stricken Nakoyomiketl.

If there is one thing that defines the Underworld, it is Hunger.

THE FIVE DIRECTIONS

In addition to existing on three levels, the Universe is also divided into five cardinal directions, each home to different beings and different energies. These directions span the different levels--the Northern Sky has commonalities with the Northern Earth and the Northern Underworld, for instance--and create separate territories for gods and creatures who oppose one another.

East is the primary direction in Semanawak. When people imagine a map of Semanawak, East is always located in the "up" position. It is the direction from which the Sun rises each

morning, and also the direction from which the prevailing Winds blow. It is therefore associated with birth, light, and great words. It is home to Ehekamitotiani the Wind God and all his glorious followers.

South is the direction of Rain and Water and the home of the rain goddess, Elopatiliztli. The purest waters flow into the Valley from the South, and the lushest lowland jungles lie beyond the southern mountains. Therefore, South is seen as the source of all water, and is home to all the creatures and spirits of water.

West is the direction of Earth, dusk, and death. It is where the Sun goes to die each day, where it enters into the Underworld. West is the mouth of the Earth, and is home to Itztechiwani and the other gods and creatures of Earth and darkness.

North is the direction of Fire, thirst, and warfare. To the north is the great desert, home to raiders, monsters, and aggressive spirits or war and fire. It is the homeland of Oleletl the war god, and of his eternal legion.

Center is the direction of light and darkness, of noon and midnight. It is the core of community, but also the place from which all great troubles come. Small wonder, then, that Wey-sitlalin the wise Sun goddess and Xolokwani the insidious Moon god both claim it as their domain.

SACRED AND PHYSICAL

There is no difference between the sacred and the physical in Semanawak. They are impossible to separate. Rain is both a physical substance and divine energy--without the physical, the sacred cannot reach Earth, and without the sacred, the Earth cannot be renewed. Another way to say it is that the rain's nourishing ability is what makes it sacred. Sacred doesn't refer to some disembodied, transcendental essence. It is concrete and tied to the physical world.

For this reason, objects and materials are of great importance to religion in Semanawak. Costumes, weapons, incense, blood, bones, and other relics are crucial components of ritual because they are physical ties to the sacred. They are ancient reminders of those who came before, infused with the ability to inspire and remind and, in the right hands, the ability to bring their powers to life again.



UNDERSTANDING SACRED AND PHYSICAL

A good way to understand the relationship between sacred and physical is to imagine a photograph. It is just an object, but the image upon it contains tremendous information. Famous photographs encapsulate the flavor of a moment or even an entire era, and can literally change the course of history. Photographs of loved ones can keep them alive long after they have gone, and allow you to pass on their memory to others. They can bring not just that person back to life, but all the people around them, and all the situations they were involved in.

Perhaps those moments and memories exist separate from the photograph. But without the photograph, you cannot access them. If you lose a picture, it becomes very difficult to remember it. The memory fades, and it is not triggered as often.

If you can understand why a person would fight so hard to preserve their last picture of a loved one long gone, you can understand the connection between the sacred and the physical in Semanawak.



REENACTMENT

Sacred Reenactment is a way of connecting with the past and summoning the wisdom and power of the gods and the ancients. Just as certain objects are sacred because of the knowledge and powers they remember, so too are certain actions.

Rituals in Semanawak consist almost entirely of participants symbolically reenacting a famous event, telling the story through deeds rather than words. They are like living codex images, like a portal to other times and places. Reenactment brings the viewers into the event and connect them to it with all of their senses. It is literally living history and living faith.

Reenactment can also summon the power represented in the event. For instance, the reenactment of Teosinte's death during the Planting of Maize festival in Mixiwiliztlan releases the same energies that Teosinte herself released when it first happened. By emulating her actions so closely, the woman reenacting Teosinte actually becomes the goddess, and is able to wield her powers. Then, in order to release the summoned energies back into the universe, the reenactor is sacrificed.

SACRIFICE

Sacrifices are some of the most important rituals in New Fire. They are a duty, a goal, and a privilege. Through sacrifice humans repay the gods for giving them life, and contribute their strength to the rising of the Sun and the renewal of the sacred cycles.

The most common form of sacrifice is bloodletting. The worshipper takes an obsidian blade, a maguey thorn, a stingray spine, or whatever sharp implement is at hand and pierces a number of sacred places on the body--the ears, tongue, thighs, and genitals. The blood released from these wounds is collected in a special bowl and offered to whichever gods the worshipper wishes to appease. Other times they flick it onto the ground or upon an idol. Most people only do this on special occasions, but Priests do it four times a day, every day. They may also offer blood in order to call upon the magic of certain gods.

Another form of sacrifice is the offering of physical objects or materials--incense, tools and crafts, food, and so on. One of the most common object sacrifices occurs when an army returns from war. The city collects all the weapons in the Sacred Precinct and burns them in a great bonfire, thereby transferring the energy of weapons and the blood they drew to the gods.

A similar sacrifice occurs whenever a city or kalpuli completes an expansion of its temple, except instead of weapons the people smash and destroy all their pots, vases, and household implements. They then create a fresh set of tools that are infused with the energy of the new temple. There are both sacred and practical dimensions to this, for, in addition to releasing sacred energy, it also ensures that everybody is using crisp new tools and weapons rather than old and worn out ones.



"Know this, youths who seek glory in war: if it is easy for you to offer your captive, or if it is easy for you to die, then you have offered nothing! A life that passes unmourned was not worthy of the gods. Sacrifices are born up to the House of the Sun on a river made from the tears of those they leave behind. You may think your job has ended when you take your captive by the hair and drag him from the battlefield. But it is just beginning..."

--Tonawak (One Who Possesses Light),
Eagle Warrior of Teoyeztekco

The most dramatic sacrifice, however, is the offering of human life to the gods. Some sacrifices are willing volunteers eager to show their devotion and pay the ultimate price to help their community survive. But the most reliable offerings are captives from enemy cities or villages taken during wartime. The stronger and fiercer the opponent, the greater the glory of the sacrifice. And the more bravely the captive faces death on the altar, the greater the glory he or she earns. There is no shame in being captured by a worthy opponent--whether captor or captive, a good fight and an honorable end bring glory and fame to all.

Each god and goddess has a unique human sacrifice ritual. Some demand that the captive be tied up and shot with arrows. Others require that he be tied to a stone in the middle of an arena and made to fight as a gladiator. But the most important sacrifice--a sacrifice to the Sun--is done by stretching the offering over a waist high stone, cutting a hole in his chest, and pulling out his still-beating heart.

This is the death that every Warrior dreams of, for it ensures that the Warrior's spirit will go on to heaven to join the other brave warriors who are carrying the Sun through the Skies. This is both rewarding and supremely fulfilling, for those who perish on the sacrifice stone die knowing that their deaths allow the universe to continue, that they are literally saving the world from darkness and destruction.

Though they are invariably agonizing and frightening, these rituals are not done simply to be cruel. They are not a method of torture, they are not joyful or entertaining, and they are *never* done as a means of punishment. To do these things to a person outside of the sacred context would be a horrible crime.

Human sacrifice is the most profound religious act in Semanawak. There is nothing routine or easy about it, whether you are the offering or the killer. Some might think that such rituals indicate a culture that sees life as worthless. Nothing could be further from the truth. A human life is the most precious thing in the world, and that is precisely why offering one is so powerful.

When a person dies there is sadness, pain, and loss. If there wasn't, there would be no sacrifice.





GODS

The gods of Semanawak are a group of powerful (but not all-powerful) beings who run the universe. They create and drive nature, but in order to maintain their vigor they must be cared for and worshipped by humans.

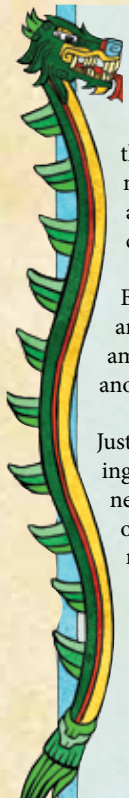
NATURE OF THE GODS

The most basic question one can ask about the gods is "What are they?" There is no easy answer to this. Even the most learned Priest will smile sheepishly and answer "What are they *not*?"

Think of the gods as personified forces of nature. Ehekamitotiani is the face of the wind, Itztechiwani is the flesh of the Earth, and so on. They are physical beings who are present wherever these elements are. They can control them and sense things through them. They can exist in many places at the same time; wherever there is rain, there is Elopatiliztli. They can be injured and killed. But they are always reborn--you can extinguish one fire, but so long as fires burn on Earth, Oleletletl will live.

The gods have many physical forms and bodies, including a human form. But they are also capable of transformation and switch between many forms quickly and easily. For instance, Elopatiliztli may take the form of a cloud, transform into rain and come down to Earth, flow as water into a river, take the form of a caiman and attack someone who has displeased her, then bask in the Sun and transform into mist to return to the Sky.

Gods only appear in human form through Ixiptas (deity re-enactors). Ixiptas start as humans, but by donning sacred garments and performing rituals they literally transform into the god whose form they have taken. Others then worship them,



"The nature of the Universe is flowing energy. There are infinite forms of energy in nature--Life Energy, Male Energy, Female Energy, Fire Energy, Water Energy--but they all have two things in common: they flow, and they change. Energy may be taken from nature and transformed into whatever is needed. It is abundant and generously offered to those who are gracious and wise.

But there can be no new Energy. Across all the lands and levels and directions of the universe, there is a set amount of Energy. To use it in one place is to take it from another.

Just as people live and die, so too do our tools, our buildings, and even our societies. They perish and blend into new tools, new buildings, and new societies. Those who offer up this energy freely will be forever young, forever renewed by it. Those who try to hold onto it will fade away."

--Tekpatletzin (Flint Fire),
Smoking Priest of Popokatetlan



"Energy is never taken--to do so would doom us all. Rather, energy is *borrowed*. Life is the borrowing of energy from the Universe. We take what we need to live, we create children and beautiful works, and then, when we're old, we die, and return our energy to the universe.

A society that captures energy cannot endure. It will explode or it will starve itself by killing off its own rain. Societies that endure are those through which energy flows freely. They are not dams, but rather boats. But as you float upon the Great River, the longer you live, the further you will drift from where you started."

--Teoxiwl (Precious Turquoise),
Singing Priestess of Ilwikalko

call upon them for blessings, and ultimately sacrifice them in order to release the divine energies they gather by being so adored.

Many imagine that the gods wander about like superpowered humans. But in reality the human form that most imagine is merely the ixipta form. Gods only takes that form when summoned into a human body. It is no more "correct" than when they appear as clouds, rain, or caimans. They are *all* "real forms!" They are streams of sacred energy constantly shifting through the universe, like a tree growing from seed to sapling to tree and then back to seed, over and over again.

The gods are very powerful, and they know more of the universe than any human. But they are not all-powerful or all-knowing. They are limited by the physical substances they control. For instance, Oleletletl can hear anything said around a fire or during war. But if you avoid fire and war, you will also avoid Oleletletl. He will be unable to harm or help you.

Of course, staying clear of the gods isn't easy. There are very few places where one can be entirely free from their influence. For instance, if you eat food that was cooked over a fire, Oleletletl can touch it. He could burn poisonous leaves in a faraway place and then shift into a variety of intermediate forms to bring the noxious smoke to the cooking fire and poison your food.

Sometimes the gods are generous and merciful, and they offer the key to greater understanding. Other times they are fickle, cruel, easily offended, and downright petty. People worship the gods out of love and admiration, but also out of fear. Earning their favor while avoiding their wrath is the unending balancing act that all must perform.

Gods depend upon people for survival, but they focus on the greater group rather than the individual. Humans are maize stalks and weeds in the field. The gods are concerned with the entire field, not individual plants. They intervene if the field is in trouble. They pull weeds if they start to overtake the maize. But they do not weep over each maize stalk or begrudge a few weeds here and there.





Just as farmers have lives beyond their fields, so too do the gods have concerns beyond humans on Earth. And just as maize cannot understand human wars, trade, and society, neither can humans understand the greater designs of the gods.

MANY STARS, MANY GODS

Nobody knows for sure how many gods there are. Even the most extensive codices do not describe them all. Some are well-known and worshipped across many lands. Others are only worshipped by a few people. Each Altepetl has a small group of gods that it is particularly devoted to, which are part of a generally accepted pantheon across the Empire and the rest of Semanawak. But this list is not exhaustive. New gods are born and discovered frequently.

WISHING UPON MANY STARS

Semanawak's attitude towards gods is *The more, the merrier*. It is important to pay respect to the deities you rely upon. For instance, residents of Popokatetlan worship Itziwitl, the volcano god, to keep him from drowning their city in lava. But gods are not particularly jealous or possessive. People call upon many gods in many situations. They make offerings to Akoatl before embarking on boat trips, to Ehekamitotiani when climbing cliffs, and to Ometochtli while drinking. The more gods you know, the more help you can get. Devotion is rewarded but not required.



There are no rules against worshipping the gods of faraway lands. Every region has its own gods, and only a fool would offend them while occupying their land. You are at their mercy unless you bring along your own gods (in the form of sacred relics). Priests are blessed with the ability to commune with all sacred beings, and are responsible for mediating between these beings and mortals. Whether she knows them or not, Priests visiting new lands are duty-bound to come to an accord with the gods of those lands for the benefit of their companions.

Priests may bring new gods back to their Altepetl to earn their favor and provide their people with new spiritual resources. Foreigners are often interested and receptive, even covetous of another region's gods, especially if they are very powerful.

People respect all the gods and treat all idols with respect. Some dislike certain gods, but they do not question their existence or validity if their powers are evident.

IDOLS AND SACRED BUNDLES

There is no separation between the physical and the sacred. Idols and Sacred Bundles are the gods' physical forms, and as such, they are the gods. When you speak to them, you speak to the gods they represent. The gods see everything you do in the presence of their idols. They may not always respond, but they are aware. Priests wield the gods' magic by calling upon Idols and Sacred Bundles.

Idols are the large statues typically kept inside temples. They

are dressed in sacred garments and respectfully shrouded from direct view with gauzy curtains. The greatest magic streams from a god's Idol.

However, because of their size and value, Idols are rarely moved from their temples for fear of damaging them. Also, gods do not like being dragged around. They demand the best treatment for their Idols--banners, a palanquin, dancers and singers, and a whole glorious procession. Moving an Idol without these things grossly offends the god, as do any mistakes during the move (dropping the Idol, insufficient audience turn out, bad weather, and so on). It takes a lot of planning and effort, and even then there are many risks. Therefore, it only happens when absolutely necessary.

Sacred Bundles are small and portable. They are packages of relics wrapped in fine cloth--ixipta bones, gems, tools, and weapon fragments proven to be connected to the god the Bundle represents. Like Idols, Sacred Bundles are worshipped and called upon for magic. But they are not as powerful as idols, and may not be used to perform the greatest of miracles. Temples have only one Idol, but they may have several Sacred Bundles.

Typically, Priests carry Sacred Bundles on their backs when they go to war or on journeys to ensure access to their gods even in faraway lands. They literally bring their gods with them. While Bundles do not require as much ceremony as Idols, Priests must still care for them. They must shelter them from the weather and from the hazards of the road, and they must never drop the Bundle to the ground. It must be carried by a Priest or housed in a shrine (building a small shrine for the Bundles is part of making camp for a Priest).

RESPECT FOR IDOLS AND SACRED BUNDLES

Because they are gods themselves, Idols and Sacred Bundles are treated with the utmost respect by worshippers and enemies alike. Priests are responsible for protecting and caring for any sacred objects entrusted to them. If she allows harm to come to them, the god withdraws his or her favor, both from the Priest who failed and the entire Altepetl. The erring Priest may face punishment from her peers, but everybody must deal with the consequences.

Enemies are often tempted to damage or destroy the Idols and Bundles of opposing Priests. These sacred objects boost morale and allow Priests to use magic, and if the Priests fail to protect the objects the gods will turn on them. The fact that Idols and Bundles are very fragile only adds to the temptation.

However, this is quite literally an attack on the god, and they *always* answer in kind. Gods exact revenge against the attacker and anyone close to him. For example, someone who attacks Oleletletl will never be able to use fire again. Every fire he approaches will sputter and die--campfires, cooking fires, torches, and so on. Anyone who invites him to sit by their campfire will be left cold and in the dark. Anyone who invites him into



their home will be unable to cook. There is nothing as miserable and isolating as a god's vengeance. Therefore, only the most hateful and foolish ever harm sacred objects.

THE GODS

These are the major deities of the Empire, but there are many more. People throughout Semanawak worship hundreds--maybe thousands--of gods. Every Kalpuli and village has its own assortment of ancestor gods. Faraway lands have entire pantheons of gods that are not yet embraced by the Empire. Countless ancient gods lurk just out of sight, waiting to be re-discovered. Or released...

EASTERN GODS

East is the direction of Wind and Dawn. The Sun rises out of the underworld in the east, and the prevailing winds arrive from the east. It is a place of light, color, and creation, and its gods are associated with these traits.



EHEKAMITOTIANI-WIND DANCER

Ehekamitotiani is the god of the Wind and the ruler of the Eastern Skies. He is also known as the Fourth Sun or the White Sun because he ruled over the fourth age as a great white light in the sky.

Personality

Ehekamitotiani is a bold, impetuous god who is often seen as a bit of a daredevil and a show off. He is vain and free spirited and lives for praise and adoration. But he has much to be proud of, for he is the one who slew Sipaktli to create the world.

He dances through the sky, leaping from cliffs and swooping down over the world. He dutifully escorts his sister Elopazitlitzli, the rain goddess, across the sky, but he is much happier when he picks up clouds of dust, leaves, or feathers and uses them in his dances. He is carefree and emotional, quick to make friends, quick to make enemies, and quick to forget about both.

Domain

Ehekamitotiani is present wherever there is Wind, Movement, or Dancing. He can be found in the gentlest breeze and the most fearsome gale, and in all the infinite dances of the land-human ceremonies, swaying trees, drifting seeds, and running animals. Nobody in Semanawak dances alone. If you are lonely you have only to dance, and the wind god will be your companion until sleep claims you.

Worshipping Ehekamitotiani

Ehekamitotiani loves those who move passionately, skillfully, and without fear: dancers, runners, jumpers, and climbers. But clumsiness angers him terribly, especially when it ruins the beauty of a dance or a view. This is why the scenic mountains are so unforgiving; those who stumble are thrown from the cliffs by the wrathful wind god.

Ehekamitotiani delights in colorful, beautiful offerings that catch on the wind. Flower petals are his favorite, but he also eagerly accepts feathers and pieces of light cloth. It is customary to stand atop a high point and throw these offerings into the air. If the wind picks them up and carries them away, you will know that Ehekamitotiani has accepted them.

Humans offered to Ehekamitotiani must leap from a high cliff and perish in the fall. Their courage and dedication deeply move him, and it is said that those who die in this way may join him on his endless wanderings through the world. Only those who willingly jump are accepted--those who are pushed earn nothing but scorn, and those who push them risk being made to follow.



KWEKWEPONIWITL--BLOOMING FEATHER

Kwekweponiwitl is the goddess of beauty, art, pleasure, and love. She is the lover of all who create beauty, and the mother of everything they create. She is the muse of Semanawak who inspires humans and shares the wonders of the worlds beyond.

Personality

Kwekweponiwitl is a kind and generous goddess, but she is also a merciless heartbreaker, for she is faithful to no one. Her favors and inspiration are her own, and she bestows them as she pleases. She possesses a free and flowing spirit that goes where it chooses and belongs to no one.

Kwekweponiwitl loves humans. She recognizes that they can discover truths that the immortal gods will never know, and she helps them when she can. Each word she whispers inspires passion and vision, painters see marvelous sights in their mind's eye, Flower Singers taste the nectar of the heavenly meadows, and lovers finally realize their true feelings.

However, while she may love humans, she will never care for any single human for more than a moment, for she also craves variety and novelty. She is fleeting beauty and fleeting inspiration, coming and going as she pleases and forcing all to make the most of their time with her or lose it forever. She can be generous but also stunningly cruel and careless, granting the same idea to mortal enemies, and inspiring love for another when one is already married.

Domain

Kwekweponiwitl is present wherever there is Beauty, Creation, and Death. She is the flower that grows, blossoms, then withers away. Everything she gives will be taken away when she leaves, but will bloom again in someone else. Whether it is love, innovation, artistic inspiration, or anything else, Kwekweponiwitl is the single perfect moment passing through the universe, coming for some, going for others, and either a treasured memory or a dreamy hope for everyone else.

Worshipping Kwekweponiwitl

Kwekweponiwitl loves those who are willing to embrace life and make the most of her gifts, but she does not like to be kept waiting. Those who do not act on her inspiration immediately will lose it never receive her favors again.

Anything beautiful is a suitable offering for Kwekweponiwitl. It must be either burned or broken and scattered to the wind. She takes these things and wears them to enhance her beauty and renew her ability to inspire. But anything you offer must first be viewed and enjoyed by others, for beauty gains its power from admiration. The more something is adored, the greater a gift it makes for Kwekweponiwitl.

Despite her sacred connections to death, Kwekweponiwitl does not demand many human sacrifices. She only accepts them at the Flower Festival in Xochitlan. Those she does accept must be artists, musicians, or other creators of beauty, and they must be completely willing. She will not take war captives.



Tlatekwinewetl--THUNDER DRUM

Tlatekwinewetl is the god of storms and music. He is the defender of the Skies who frightens off intruders with his booming war songs and lightning bolt arrows.

Personality

Tlatekwinewetl takes a profound joy in his duties. He relishes the echoes of his drum and his voice across the land and laughs as animals and humans alike to scatter in panic. Though he rarely causes intentional harm, he is excitable. When he gets worked up, his winds uproot trees and his lightning arrows explode entire buildings. He is a fun-loving god, but his fun can be pretty rough. He is an older brother trying to play with someone much younger and weaker.

He is a vain and boastful god. Many of his storms are little more than spectacular displays in the sky, thunder and lightning shows to impress the people and spirits of Earth.

So long as people bow before his might, he is pleased. However, he never backs down from a challenge, either real or perceived. He strikes any person who raises his fist to the stormy sky with his lightning arrows. Sometimes he even strikes down particularly tall trees or buildings, convinced that they are somehow a challenge to his power and authority. Some even say that bragging can attract his bolts (particularly parents trying to teach their children modesty).

Domain

Tlatekwinnewetl is present wherever there are Storms, Music, and Arrows. Humans first learned how to drum by listening to his thunder, and they first learned to sing by listening to his howling winds. His power lives on in these small Earthly representations.

Worshipping Tlatekwinnewetl

Tlatekwinnewetl has no respect for the weak and the timid. However, those who are too noisy or boastful may be seen as a challenge. While the storm god admires anyone with the nerve to challenge him, he does not hesitate to put them in their place. Most do not survive this process, but the few who do become some of the most holy figures in Semanawak.

The storm god gladly accepts offerings of drums, arrows, and ranged weapons. He prefers that they be left upon a high ridge during a storm so he can reach down and use them in his display. If the offerings are gone after the storm passes, he has accepted them.

Some are bolder with their offerings, shooting arrows into the storm clouds or playing their drums along with the thunder. This is a bit like a small dog barking at a jaguar, and it never fails to amuse Tlatekwinnewetl. The longer you keep it up, the more respect you earn from the god and bystanders. But Tlatekwinnewetl does not pull his punches when he does decide to strike.

Human sacrifices stand out in the open during a storm while drummers and singers make glorious music in praise of Tlatekwinnewetl. Warriors and Priests shoot arrows into the sacrifice, each one accompanied by a thunderous drumroll. The sacrifices remain standing for as long as possible to taunt the shooters with their strength and courage. When they are riddled with arrows and finally slump to the ground, one of the Priests finishes them off with a heavy club.

TEOXOTLANI-LIGHTER OF THE SACRED FLAME

Teoxotlani is the god of dawn, honorable warfare, and heroism. He is the son of Weytsitlalin the Sun Goddess, the patron of the Tonalteka people, and a symbol of all who fight for the good. He is the god in the upper right corner of the Eastern Gods picture.

Teoxotlani was born from a strange glowing feather that fell from parts unknown into Weytsitlalin's hair. She placed the feather under her clothing for safekeeping. When she searched



for it later that night, it was gone, and she was pregnant. Weytsitlalin's jealous sister, Chokanantzin, grew angry when she saw that the Sun was pregnant, claiming that Weytsitlalin had broken her vow of chastity and betrayed them all. She then sent her army of Tzitzimime (Star Demons) to depose Weytsitlalin.

As the Tzitzimime approached, Weytsitlalin whispered to the god child within her. "Know this, you who dwell in heavenly light within my belly: the world you live in is under attack! I know you are small and frightened, and I wish I could have spared you these troubles. But you must grow up fast, my tender child, and face the dangers that menace your world, because no one but you can save it!"

As soon as she finished, Teoxotlani sprung forth from inside of her, fully grown and armed as a Warrior. He attacked the Tzitzimime, cut them to pieces, and sent them tumbling down from the skies.

Personality

Teoxotlani is the epitome of the honorable Warrior and citizen: selfless, fearless, and utterly devoted to his community. Whether facing enemies on the battlefield or helping a neighbor fix her roof, every moment is a chance to be a hero and make a difference. He accepts the troubles of the universe without complaint, and instead of hiding behind excuses he lends his strength to the cause of good.

Teoxotlani is not a merciful god, however. He is ruthless and unforgiving, and he does not tolerate human faults or cowardice. He is the embodiment of duty and leadership, and those who fail in either lose his trust and invite his wrath. The starving man who steals food, the guard who nods off during his watch, and the constable who offers mercy "just this once" are all failures to Teoxotlani.



Domain

Teoxotlani is found wherever there is Fire, Leadership, and Blood. He is the first light in the sky that leads the way to day, and he is the last drop of blood that spills from the veins of a hero who dies for a greater cause. He is also the fire at Tloteoxiwakan. It was he who guided the Tonalteka back to the Valley after the Time of Wandering, and all the light now in the Valley ultimately comes from him.

Worshipping Teoxotlani

Teoxotlani smiles on those who do the right thing, no matter how large or small their deeds. The child who returns a feather to the person who dropped it, the traveler who hears a cry and stops to help, and the Warrior who dies so that his Altepetl can win are all heroes to Teoxotlani.

Teoxotlani accepts offerings that befit a noble Warrior. Weapons, shields, war costumes, and other suitable rewards for honorable service may be burned in his honor. He blesses those who offer aid to soldiers and Warriors, whether it is food, shelter, or entertainment. He understands the weight that soldiers bear and looks favorably upon those who do what they can to give soldiers strength.

Teoxotlani's sacrifice ritual is one of the bloodiest. A brave captive dons dark clothes and a fearsome mask that represents the Star Demons. He or she ascends the pyramid amidst the cries and screams of the people below. At the top, a Priest bends the captive over an altar and cuts out his or her heart, then raises it to the sky so the Sun may feast upon its life force.

A second Priest decapitates the body and kicks it down the pyramid steps. As it tumbles, the mangled body splatters sacred blood. Worshippers catch the body at the bottom and swiftly dismember it. The ritual represents Teoxotlani's triumph over the Tzitzimime, how he cut them to pieces and sent them raining down from the sky to save the Sun.

Traditionally, this ritual is performed with Kakayawani captives, who serve as the human versions of the Star Demons who menace the Sun. This also adds an element of political triumph to the proceedings. It allows the people of the Empire to cheer as they watch their enemies defeated and torn apart.

SOUTHERN GODS

South is the direction of Water and Rain. The Wet Season arrives from the south, and the greatest garden in all Semanawak lies just beyond the southern mountains. It is a place of life, lushness, and fertility, and the gods of this region are associated with these traits.



ELOPATILIZTLI-HEALER OF MAIZE

Elopatiliztli is the goddess of the Rain and the ruler of the Southern Skies. She is also known as the Third Sun or the Blue Sun because she ruled over the third age as a great blue light in the sky.

Personality

Elopatiliztli is a longsuffering and dutiful goddess who roams from place to place tending to all the world's gardens. She is a sturdy, hardworking mother who suffers to provide for those under her care. The rain is her blood, sweat, and tears--divine evidence of her efforts on behalf of her children on Earth.

Elopatiliztli has sacrificed much for the world. She shed her blood so that the Earth would be fertile. She gave up her creations, the Water People, so the people of Earth would have finite lifespans and not overcrowd the land. She also gave her only daughter, Teosinte, so that maize would grow and humans would have food to eat. Her generosity and selflessness are why life exists at all.

Her love for the Earth cannot be questioned. However, this love sometimes ferments into a deep, seething resentment whenever people misuse or fail to appreciate her gifts. She suffers so that plants may grow, and those who fail to care for their crops insult her. She bleeds so that water comes to the world, and those who use it carelessly infuriate her. Their offenses cause her to turn away in anger, which brings drought and famine to the land.

Domains

Elopatiliztli is present wherever there are Blood, Sweat, and Tears. She labors beside everyone who suffers, works, and cries for others. They all share her load. She is everywhere that rain falls upon hardworking, dutiful people.

Worshipping Elopatiliztli

Elopatiliztli smiles upon the hardworking, the self-sacrificing, and the grieving. She knows these burdens all too well and loves everyone who shares them with her. Those who return Elopatiliztli's generosity to the world earn her gratitude and can turn to the rain mother for support and solace in hard times.

More people are sacrificed to Elopatiliztli than to any other god or goddess, but this is not because she demands it. It is because she needs it.

There is a story in which Elopatiliztli transforms herself into a pitcher of water and pours its lifegiving liquid down upon the Earth. She vows that she will spend eternity bowed over, working and pouring, so that people will never be hungry or thirsty. But eventually her pitcher runs dry, because not even a goddess's pitcher is infinite. A wise Priestess refills the pitcher by slashing her wrists and letting her blood flow into it. Just before she dies she delivers this piece of wisdom:

"The goddess of rain will spend an eternity giving to us, holding nothing back for herself. It is up to us to make sure that she always has something to give."

Consequently, sacrifices to Elopatiliztli involve bleeding the offering to death, while he or she walks across farm fields or through rivers, so that the precious blood may refill the pitcher of rain. These sacrifices are accompanied by public displays of sadness and sorrow. Witnesses weep hysterically, adding their tears to the pitcher so Elopatiliztli can experience a moment of respite from her own grief.

TEOSINTE--SACRED MAIZE

Teosinte is the goddess of maize and agriculture, and perhaps the most beloved deity in all of Semanawak. She is the embodiment of youthful curiosity, generosity, and innocence, and is represented by the wild maize that grows on Earth.

Personality

Teosinte is creative and very bright. She is a master farmer and gardener who created the countless varieties of plants that make life on Earth possible. She is an artisan of life, a sculptor



of everything that grows. She is also devoted to her family and her community. Just as Elopatiliztli is Semanawak's idealized mother figure, Teosinte is its idealized daughter figure.

Teosinte is very charitable. She spread her seeds simply because she wanted to help the creatures of Earth. Even in death, her body saved humanity from starvation. She inspires people to give even when they have nothing to gain so that the world will be a better place, and when people experience a stroke of good luck, such as finding a bush of delicious berries or something they thought they had lost, it is always little Teosinte that they thank.

Despite this, Teosinte is still a child, so she can also be rather immature and petty sometimes. Unlike most gods, she usually forgives large mistakes. But small, seemingly minor offenses can make her incomprehensibly upset. Her anger results in crop failures and great hardship, so everyone must be very careful not to offend the brilliant little maize goddess.

Domain

Teosinte is found wherever there are Plants, Generosity, and Fertility. She is most well-known and beloved for her maize, but she is responsible for all of the world's plants and has supreme power over them. It is easy to overlook her miraculous creations are since people use them every day. But the ease with which plants offer up their seeds and nutrients is no accident. Their generosity comes directly from Teosinte's heart.

Worshipping Teosinte

Teosinte loves the young and young at heart, as well as those who experiment and approach the world with curiosity and joy. Nothing brings her more happiness than seeing farmers develop new varieties of maize, and nothing angers her more than people who neglect their plants.

People pay their respects to Teosinte by growing her sacred wild maize alongside their cultivated varieties. Those who give wild maize a place to grow and treat it with respect find that their own crops grow better and are more resilient. People also





offer seeds to Teosinte after rain showers (because Teosinte follows closely behind her mother, Elopatiliztli). They scatter the seeds to the wind or leave them neatly bundled in a small bag.

Teosinte's human sacrifices are surprisingly grisly for such a mild-mannered deity. They are all reenactments of her tragic death. In the stories, Teosinte falls from the Sky after being either pushed or frightened by Xolokwani the jealous Moon god. She lands on a steep mountainside and is ripped apart by sharp rocks. Pieces of her body then grow into wild maize. Consequently, those sacrificed in Teosinte's honor are pelted, flayed, and dismembered by sharp rocks and knives and then scattered across the farm fields, where they may cause maize to grow just like Teosinte.



TLAKWEP--VOMIT EATER

Tlakwepa is the goddess of filth, guilt, and shame. She was created from the largest mouth of Sipaktli by Nakoyomiketl, the god of the dead, as a cruel joke. Whereas Sipaktli once devoured gods and everything good in the universe, Tlakwepa now devours everything foul.

Personality

Tlakwepa is a most unusual goddess. She seeks out shame and misdeeds like a fly seeks out carrion, yet she is utterly without shame herself. She is dirty, disgusting, promiscuous, and ill-mannered and is treated as such by all others, but she never seems to care. In fact, she seems strangely good natured about it. Small wonder that most consider her to be at least a little bit insane.

Her delight in the sordid, sinful details of life hovers between hunger, fascination, and sexual attraction. She listens to guilty confessions with wide-eyed wonder and eagerly asks for more. She is not shy about asking agonizingly frank follow up questions and makes no effort to hide her pleasure at the answers.

Though disturbing, confessions to Tlakwepa are highly therapeutic, so long as one does not hold back. She has a mercilessly keen sense for secret shame and dirtiness. The more one holds back, the more frenzied she gets, until eventually she devours everything in her haste to get the secret. And a single touch from Tlakwepa covers one in all the grime and dirt of the universe--punishment for keeping shameful secrets.

Domain

Tlakwepa is found wherever there is filth. She serves as the garbage pit of the universe, the receptacle for all the things that others wish to rid themselves of. Though she is the very embodiment of disgust and impurity, it is she who allows others to become clean again by taking away their filth. She is closely associated with bathing and bath houses, with purification, and also with confession. When people commit unforgivable acts, they go to the temple of Tlakwepa to confess and regain peace. Therefore, Tlakwepa is also the goddess of truth and healing. Healing can only take place when toxins are purged with the medicine of truth.

Worshipping Tlakwepa

Tlakwepa loves honesty. Those who admit their faults and mistakes are blessed with a tremendous feeling of relief and purity, indicating that Tlakwepa has eaten their guilt and carried it away. She also loves those who bathe frequently because they give her more dirt to eat. But while there is nothing that can really make Tlakwepa angry, those who hold back the truth or who do not keep themselves clean attract an undesirable level of attention and interest, and are therefore corrupted by her continual noxious presence.

The most common offerings to Tlakwepa are byproducts of bathing in the steam house. The sweat, dirt, and toxins that are shed are gleefully eaten by the goddess and carried away, leaving her satisfied. Confessions are made during steam baths. It is important to make a confession in a normal tone of voice because Tlakwepa does not respond to discreet whispers. The confessor must make no excuses and hold nothing back.

Tlakwepa takes two types of human sacrifices. The first is exclusively performed in the city of Tlatlahako at the Great Steamhouse. Bathers enter the legendarily hot steam room and stay until they die, allowing Tlakwepa to devour everything. Most of these sacrifices are guilty of terrible, unforgivable crimes, and they seek redemption in lethal cleansing.

In the second type of sacrifice, a single person volunteers to take all the shame and guilt of her community and carry it away. She dresses in humble clothing and walks through the city while residents jeer and throw handfuls of mud, dung, and rotten vegetables. People touch her to ritually deposit their sins and the sins of their Households.

After absorbing everyone's shame and filth, she wades into a river where Priests have lured a hungry caiman, an earthly representation of Tlakwepa. The animal then devours her.





AKOATL--WATER SERPENT

Akoatl is the god of rivers and snakes, the god of water that flows and shapes. His endless coils snake across Earth, connecting distant lands and creating channels where life and trade flow. Many have made their fortunes sliding along his back, but just as many have met their end inside his watery belly.

Personality

Aside from Teomochi, no god embodies duality like Akoatl. He is a collection of seemingly contradictory traits: patient yet always moving, predictable yet treacherous, cold blooded yet aggressive, and life-giving yet lethal. He carries brutal invaders just as easily as he carries vital supplies, and he sinks boats full of children as surely as he sinks boats full of criminals.

Akoatl is not fickle. He is simply indifferent. He is a great snake slithering through a world of grass and insects. He will not go out of his way to crush an insect, but neither will he change his path to avoid doing so.

Akoatl focuses on matters beyond human comprehension. The way he shapes and floods the land seems to have a design or purpose, but people have yet to figure it out. Some say he is creating a great codex of water and land. Some say he creates designs in the Earth that the stars may look to for guidance, the same way that humans look to the stars. And some say he is preparing the landscape for people and nations yet to come.

Whatever his ultimate goal, the river god cares little for humanity. People are free to benefit from him, but they do so at their own risk.

Domain

Akoatl is present wherever there is Water, Serpents, and Venom. Just like Akoatl himself, all three have the capacity to heal and the capacity to harm. It simply depends on how they are used.

Worshipping Akoatl

Akoatl takes little interest in human affairs, so few people truly receive his blessing. Those who accept his will and stay out of his way get along with him the best. Those who change his path or interfere with his designs invite his unstoppable wrath. He causes banks to collapse, floods to crest over levies, and great sinkholes to open up in the ground. It takes a great deal to appease Akoatl once his course has been permanently altered.

Akoatl graciously accepts offerings of blood dripped into the water. It gives him vigor as he moves across the world. He also appreciates fine wooden objects, especially weapons, which he uses to cut through new land.

Akoatl's human sacrifice rituals are dances performed with venomous snakes. Dancers must carefully learn the snakes' behavior to perform the entire dance without being bitten. A dancer who is bitten before the end has failed to sufficiently appease Akoatl and is unceremoniously dragged away. But those who are able to complete the dance must then allow the snakes to bite them repeatedly. As the venom courses through their veins, they continue to dance until they eventually lose consciousness and succumb to it.

WESTERN GODS

West is the direction of Earth and Dusk. It is where the Sun goes to die each day, and it is home to great concentrations of stone and useful Earth. It is also the direction of the great volcano. All tools and technology, and a great deal of lore, come from the Earth and the great god-artisans of the West.

ITZTECHIWANI--USER OF OBSIDIAN

Itztechiwani is the goddess of Earth and crafts and the ruler of the Western Skies. She is also known as the Second Sun or the Green Sun, as she ruled over the second age as a great green light in the sky.

Personality

Itztechiwani is brilliant, resourceful, and intensely creative. She is never content with what exists, so she seeks new tools and new ways of doing things. Hers is a life of endless invention and experimentation, and the boundless variety of materials and structures found in and on the Earth--caves and caverns, mountains, valleys, boulders, mineral veins, and more--are evidence of her productivity as well as her skill.

Itztechiwani is also a gifted planner and organizer. She planned many of the greatest accomplishments in mythic history, such as the defeat of Sipaktli that allowed the world to be created, and some say that history itself is just one long plan perfectly executed by the craft goddess.

However, unlike some other wise gods, Itztechiwani does not always use her intelligence for good. She is often devious and manipulative and takes advantage of the fact that most are not





as clever as she. She also values tools and craftsmanship more than she values life, forgetting that these are means, not ends unto themselves. She lives for the thrill of novelty and discovery. As soon as she completes a new invention, she throws it aside and starts anew.

She holds both the wonder and the brutality of progress within her stone heart. Today's world is wondrous, but she created countless others before it. They are buried in the ground, layer upon layer, world upon world. one day she will have another idea, and bury this world just like all the previous ones. The survival of humans is not her major concern--she can always create new people if she wants to.

Domain

Itztechiwani is found wherever there is Earth, Tools, Weapons, and Creation. Everything crafted initially comes from the Earth, and Itztechiwani is a part of it. Further, the very desire to build comes from Itztechiwani, from the bones she gave to create humans. Crafting happens every day, so it is easy to forget how miraculous it is. Every crafter wields a small piece of Itztechiwani's power to create something useful out of the raw materials of the universe.

Worshipping Itztechiwani

Itztechiwani loves fellow creators, those who take what she has built and make it into something new. She is joyfully present anytime people discover a new trick or technique or improve their skills. But inept or wasteful people invite her wrath, and face harsh punishment--obsidian shards that are poorly struck can cut all the way to the bone, and those who put their trust in poorly made tools see them fail at the most inopportune times.

Itztechiwani appreciates offerings of well-made tools and weapons. They are like grandchildren to her, the creations of her own creations. Unlike most gods, Itztechiwani does not ask for these objects to be destroyed. Instead, she hordes them in her temples. Her Priests create huge piles of assorted goods that the goddess may gaze upon with relish, creating a miniature landscape of crafted items that shift and change just as the Earth does.

These offering are always of the highest quality, and it is very tempting to use or steal them. However, once Itztechiwani has claimed them in her temple, she considers them part of her sacred realm. It is said that those who loot her temples will be hunted down and killed by black jaguars made of the sharpest obsidian.

Human sacrifices to Itztechiwani are dressed in the finest clothes and equipped with the finest tools, and then sealed in chambers built into hills or mountainsides. The chambers contain piles of unworked stone and raw materials. Sacrific-



es spend eternity working and creating beneath the Earth as living vessels of Itztechiwani. Once sealed, the chambers are never opened for fear of disturbing the goddess within.

ITZIWI TL--OBSIDIAN FEATHER

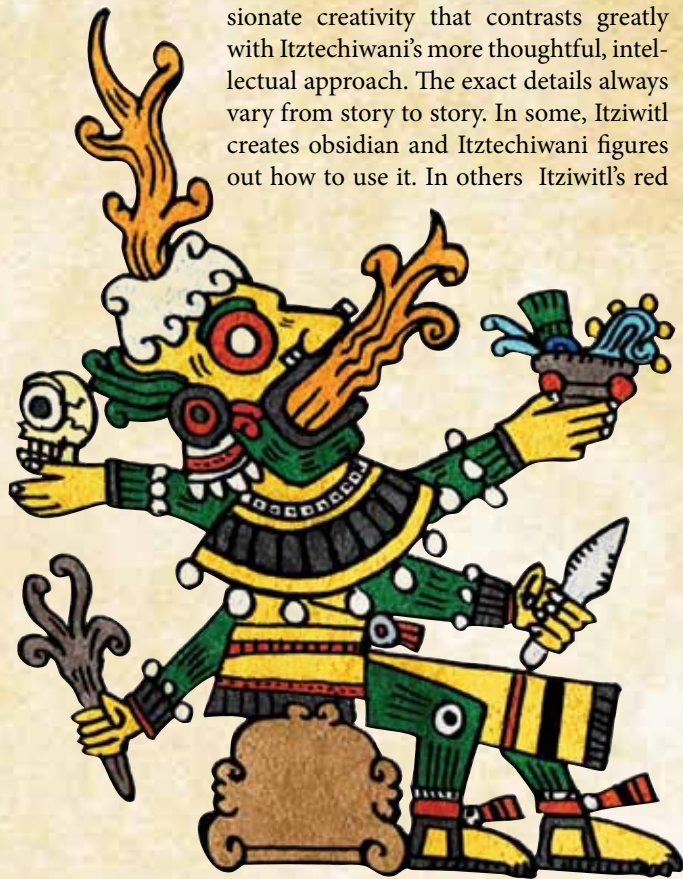
Itziwitl is the god of volcanos, lava, and the fire that lives in the Earth. He was the greatest warlord of the Fire People, and today he lives on as the god of fury and emotion, the hot blood of the Earth itself.

Personality

Rage is Itziwitl's single greatest personality trait. He represents all powerful emotions, joy, anguish, fear, and more, but chiefly rage. He is an exiled general of the Fire People who was defeated by Itztechiwani and imprisoned beneath the Earth. He has been trapped there since the age of the first Sun, and he constantly struggles to escape and take revenge on the world above. He is ambitious and indomitable, traits which, depending on the nature of the individual, may earn him admiration or hatred.

Despite his desire to destroy, Itziwitl possesses a powerful, pas-





sionate creativity that contrasts greatly with Itztechiwani's more thoughtful, intellectual approach. The exact details always vary from story to story. In some, Itziwilt creates obsidian and Itztechiwani figures out how to use it. In others Itziwilt's red

hot blood flows into the Earth only to be captured and turned into valuable obsidian by Itztechiwani. But the primary theme is that Itziwilt is the violence within the Earth, while Itztechiwani is the one who shapes it into something useful.

Domain

Itziwilt is found wherever there is Earth, Fire, and Emotion. He is the volcano within the mountains and within the human heart. He is that which seeks release, the force that destroys all barriers but, if used wisely, can change the course of history.

Worshipping Itziwilt

Warlords, rulers, and other ambitious people respect and admire Itziwilt for what he is. However, most who worship him spend the majority of their time keeping him calm and contained lest he break out and consume them all. They soothe his rage and praise his terrifying power, while vowing to bear his fury and pain so he doesn't have to.

The material Itziwilt values most is blood shed through violence. It represents the lava that escapes from the Earth as he struggles against his stony bonds. Anything destroyed while in the grips of emotion serves as tribute to Itziwilt, though most consider such "worship" inappropriate outside of special rituals.

Human sacrifices to Itziwilt climb to the tops of volcanos (especially Teminitepetl, the most revered home of the volcano god) and throw themselves into the burning chambers within. If the volcano has not yet blasted open a caldera, they may

instead choke themselves in the noxious fumes that seep up from the Earth or simply leap from volcanic peaks to die on its slopes and await the eventual flood of lava.

SIPAKTLI-EARTH CAIMAN

Sipaktli is the Earth. Itztechiwani shapes it and Itziwilt destroys it, but Sipaktli is the substance itself. She is the great sleeping alligator upon whose back the rest of the world lives. She was defeated long ago by the gods of the Skies, but she still stirs to this day in her dark, hungry dreaming. Her slightest movement can shake entire cities to the ground.

Personality

Sipaktli is a difficult goddess to understand. She is a primordial creature, and as such her mindset is quite different from the younger gods who make up the rest of the pantheon. She is simpler than most, but also deeper and more eternal. She is an animal with ages of instinct rather than knowledge to guide her. She doesn't have a personality--she has a nature.

To most, Sipaktli is a tamed monster. . In the beginning, she was a voracious sea creature who devoured everything until the other gods killed her and used her body to make land. But she is also a devoted and protective mother. When the other gods came down from the Skies, they attacked her children, and much of her fury stemmed from this. Sipaktli is an alligator with eggs in her mouth, a fearsome creature that lovingly cares for and defends those born from her.

All humans were born of the Earth, even the Tonalteka, and therefore all humans are children of Sipaktli and benefit from her protection. But like an alligator, Sipak-



tli will not mother her children forever. Eventually they must grow beyond her or be consumed. This is Sipaktli's nature: she shelters, she nurtures, and then she consumes that which is not strong enough to live on its own.

Most of the time Sipaktli lies still and dreams, basking in the Sun like an alligator and creating a stable world for others to inhabit. She is only vaguely aware of what is happening on her back. But when she stirs, the results are dramatic: the Earth shudders and shakes, structures collapse, and avalanches crash down the mountains. Her immense power makes life on Earth possible but also threatens it constantly, should she ever awaken and shake off those living on her back.

Domain

Sipaktli is found wherever there is Water, Earth, and Protection. She floats through the ancient oceans with only her back above the water. Mountains and valleys are ridges on her back that shelter and protect those who live there. Caves are mouths leading into her belly, where the dead must return to satisfy her hunger, and also passages out of her womb, from which new creatures are born. She is both a source and a final destination.

Worshipping Sipaktli

Sipaktli worshippers do not pray to win her favor, but rather to keep her calm and peaceful because she could destroy everything by simply rolling over. She does not have a code or creed like the more awakened gods, but she adores mothers and protectors. Fear that her children might be harmed inspires her rage and stirs her awake. But so long as the children are protected, she continues to sleep and dream and share her dreams with living mothers.

The strength of a mother's love comes from our primordial bond with Sipaktli and the Earth. This love is what truly keeps our world safe.

Material offerings to Sipaktli are diverse and varied, for she is not a picky goddess. Anything can be buried and thus returned to Sipaktli to satisfy her hunger and keep her from stirring. Hunters bury a portion of their kills to feed and appease her after they take one of her children. Funerals are also offerings to Sipaktli, where the dead are fed back to the Earth that bore them.

Human sacrifices to Sipaktli are rare and only occur after earthquakes, when Sipaktli requires nourishment to calm her hunger and return her to peaceful slumber. The ritual embodies the battle between Sipaktli and the Sky gods during the creation of the world. An ixipta dresses as Sipaktli and arms herself with a makwawitl. She faces five fierce Warriors, but they may not strike her until she kills one of them. After she claims her victim, the remaining Warriors descend upon her and finish her off quickly.

The ixtipa's burial feeds Sipaktli, renews her memory of being defeated by the Sky gods, and reminds her that she is dead.



TEOYATINEMINI-GOD WHO TRAVELS WITH YOU

Teoyatinemini is the god of the Xoloitzkwintli dog, the small, hairless canine that provides companionship in life and guidance through the Underworld in death. He is also the god of travel who offers direction and protection to all who journey through dangerous places. He is a person's truest, most devoted companion because he is made from the same bones as humans.

Long ago, humans were created from the bones of the people of the previous Suns. However, in order for this to happen, somebody had to venture into the Underworld to retrieve them. The gods debated over who would go, but eventually Weysitalin the Sun goddess decreed that Xolokwani the Moon god would go in order to atone for his prior mischief. The journey through this realm of nightmares was deadly and terrifying, and required all of Xolokwani's cleverness and guile.

When Xolokwani finally reached the bottom, he saw that Nakoyomiketl, the god of the dead, had fashioned the bones into a ghastly throne for himself and sat picking at them with grim fascination. Xolokwani sent a swarm of bats to drive the death god away long enough to recover the bones, and then ran as fast as he could back towards the surface.

Nakoyomiketl blew a foul vapor from his mouth, which killed the bats and revealed the escaping Moon god. He then commanded the giant worms of the Underworld to stretch across the passage and trip Xolokwani, who fell into a deep pit. The fall mixed the bones up and broke them into many different

pieces. This is why humans come in a variety of shapes and sizes. It also caused a small shard of bone to lodge deeply into Xolokwani's foot.

Xolokwani managed to drag himself up out of the pit and, after another series of amazing adventures, finally emerged from the Underworld, bearing the broken bones of the people of the previous ages and the memory of how to navigate the Underworld. The other gods took the bones but were angry that they were broken, so they refused to let him participate in the ritual to create humans. They chased him away, back to the dark corners of the Sky, and began their work.

As Xolokwani watched the other gods from the shadows, he pulled the shard of bone from his foot. His first thought was to take vengeance upon the other gods by turning the bone into a monster that would menace their human children. But as he reflected upon his trip through the Underworld, his anger cooled. Every human ever born would eventually have to make that grim journey. They would face the same terrors as he had. They would face the same darkness.

As he watched the other gods bleed to create humans, Xolokwani thought to himself: "humans will share blood with the other gods. But ultimately they will share my fate--is that not also a form of kinship?"

Xolokwani's moment of kindness was singular and fleeting, but in that moment he whispered all his knowledge and memories of the Underworld to the small bone, and then set it down. The bone was transformed by Xolokwani's blood into the Xoloitzkwintli dog, which ran over to First Man and First Woman with its tail wagging and its eyes already full of love and sympathy.

Teoyatinemini was that first dog, and he is worshipped today as the ancestor god of humanity's dearest, closest friend.

Personality

Teoyatinemini is a happy, bold, and adventurous god who is never down, even in the grimmest situations. He is brave and fearless and always tries his best, but he is a friend and guide, not a master. He helps humans face problems they encounter, but he cannot solve these problems for them.

Teoyatinemini is loyal and devoted to the end. He never turns down those who seek his aid, no matter their past or their likely future. He loves his human companions unconditionally, and thus he sometimes finds himself participating in great evil as well as good. After all, dogs don't care if their masters are murderers or saints. They will love either with equal devotion.

Domain

Teoyatinemini is found wherever there is Travel, Perception, and Loyalty. He is the trail you follow, the instincts and impulses that guide you, and the conscience that always asks you to do the right thing. He will never stop you from doing what you want to do, but he is always with you. Whatever you do, you do

it in front of Teoyatinemini. Guilt comes from Teoyatinemini looking at you, hurt and confused that his wonderful master would do something so cruel.

Worshipping Teoyatinemini

Teoyatinemini loves all and rejects none. He neither demands nor condemns any particular behavior. People miss out on his favors by ignoring him, but he will always be there when they decide to listen to their consciences. Though he is revered as a god, he is more of a servant than a lord. People pray to him for favors and gratitude rather than mercy.

Teoyatinemini asks for little besides food. Delicious meat draws his attention and keeps him close as long as the offerings continue. Fresh meat from a hunt is best, but there is nothing he will refuse.

Teoyatinemini does not accept human sacrifices; he lives to serve humans, not prey upon them. Instead, he simply asks that his dog children be allowed to accompany their human masters into the afterlife. Whenever a human dies, a xoloitzkwintli dog is killed and buried or cremated along with the human so that they may face the darkness together. This is a blessing to the human that also brings great happiness to the dog and to Teoyatinemini.

NORTHERN GODS

North is the direction of Fire and Conflict. The land north of the Valley is a sprawling, burning desert full of dangerous creatures and raiders. It is also the direction that the people of the Empire must travel to fight the Kakayawani, and from which the Kakayawani attack the Empire. It is the ultimate battlefield, and the gods who live there are the greatest Warriors in the universe.

OLETLETL-GOD OF FIRE AND WAR

Oleletlel is the god of fire and war and the ruler of the Northern Skies. He is also known as the First Sun or the Red Sun, as he ruled over the first age as a great red light in the sky.

Personality

Oleletlel is an old Warrior who grew up in a world very different from the one that exists today. His world was ruled by powerful nomadic Warriors who protected their loved ones and destroyed anyone who opposed them. Life was brutal and short, but it was also blessedly simple: fight as hard as you can against those who mean you harm, do your best to defeat them, and know that, whether you live or die, your life will have significance to those you care about and who care about you.

Oleletlel has always been a violent god, but he has a rugged love of justice (though he only dimly understands it). His idea of fairness has guided his weapon through the ages, and in time the cruelest and most unjust warlords were defeated. People were free to learn and do things besides fight, and they created the civilizations of today.



Oleletlel is proud of the culture he and his people created, but his old fashioned ruthlessness now makes him an outsider. He understands that there is more to the world than war, but war is all he knows and all he truly loves. The burning fatigue of the march, the contemplative boredom of camp, the lustful zeal of battle, and the glory of the aftermath--they were once only means, but today they have become an end unto themselves.

Oleletlel is a veteran of a thousand wars who is capable of both brutal savagery and rocklike discipline. He has triumphed over many foes, but he also bears scars from many defeats. He scorns those who idealize warfare and those who are cynical about it because both only see one side. Above all, war holds no mysteries for him. He is an old man and war is his wife, he acknowledges her virtues and vices, and he loves her for both.

Oleletlel believes that those who are strong have both the right and the obligation to rule the weak. Might is the only true law in the universe because without Might, no other law is possible. He certainly values mercy, and admires strong rulers who choose to use their power mercifully. But strong tyranny is better than weak mercy, because tyrants can learn to be merciful, whereas weakness will never endure.

Domain

Oleletlel is present wherever there is Fire, Pain, and Weapons. He is violence itself--often destructive, sometimes necessary, but always inevitable. But like all three of these things, there are two sides to him: the ability to harm, and the ability to protect.

Worshipping Oleletlel

Oleletlel smiles on strong people who are not afraid to use their strength. Social and political influence does not impress the war god because they come from others. True strength comes from oneself.

Oleletlel appreciates offerings of weapons, especially bloody ones, and tribute acquired from war. Such offerings are burned upon a large bonfire and must be accompanied by a great deal of noise and screaming in order to get the war god's attention. He is always at war, after all, so worshippers must shout over the cries of his enemies.

Human sacrifices to Oleletlel prove their worth in gladiator-style combat. Those who die fighting bravely join Oleletlel's



great army. The ritual takes place in a large arena in front of the war god's temple, where captives and volunteers fight to the death before a screaming crowd. The more opponents one defeats, the higher his rank in the afterlife.

At the end of the ritual, the last man standing is given the option to join the Screaming One Warrior House in recognition of his skill and bravery. This is a great honor, and many successful Screaming One leaders come from the sacrificial arena. If he refuses, his indomitable will is hailed by the Priests. A group of Screaming Ones then enters the arena and cuts him down, allowing him to meet his end gloriously.



TLEWACHTLI--FIRE SEED

Tlewachtli is the god of forest fires, purification and youth, of the fire that heals as well as destroys. He is the patron of the Kwatike Kalpuli and a symbol of rebellion against everything old and rotting.

Personality

Tlewachtli is passionate, youthful, and full of zeal. He is a dancer and runner who leaves flames in his wake, igniting new thoughts and new growth while burning away old clutter. The past is a prison to be escaped, and the future is a wonderland of possibility. He is irreverent, manic, and impossibly energetic. If you can keep up with him, you will enjoy life to the fullest. But if you fall behind, his flames will consume you.

Tlewachtli is impulsive, decisive, and fickle. He is ruled by the moment and will make large decisions in an instant, like a tiny spark igniting a raging forest fire. His actions have profound consequences, but he never thinks twice about them, nor does he have any regrets. Tlewachtli is perhaps the one being who has managed to escape from and live untouched by one of Semanawak's greatest blights: worry.

Tlewachtli's carefree attitude attracts many followers. But his passion for change is unconditional. Old is old, new is new, and the old--no matter how well it works or how many people love it, must be burned away to make room for the new. He topples entire societies to bring about chaos, anarchy, and change. He burns beloved codices and works of art to force reinvention and rediscovery. And he always turns his back on fulfilling relationships in favor of new, exciting flings.

Domain

Tlewachtli is present wherever there is Fire, Healing, and De-

struction. He believes deeply that people and the world are inherently healthy, and that sickness and injury are caused by impediments to that health. Therefore the treatment is to destroy those impediments. This mindset explains everything about him--the cause of all illness today is the old blights of the past, and the best way to cure such illness is to destroy everything old and pursue the shining bliss that awaits all who are fast enough to stay ahead of anything sad or hurtful.

Worshipping Tlewachtli

Tlewachtli smiles upon free thinkers, rebels, and everyone who seeks to change the world. He also loves the young, for whom the world is still fresh and new. However, there comes a time in life when people can no longer keep up with Tlewachtli, at which point they become the establishment and get to watch everything they built fall apart and change.

Tlewachtli lives to burn the old and transform it into fertile ash. He is delighted to see old things put to flame: old wood, old buildings, and even old people. He appreciates drama and spectacle. The bigger the flame, the better--and the greater the chance it will escape and cause even more excitement!

Human sacrifices to Tlewachtli are always very young or very old. The young honor Tlewachtli by living his ideal life: short, intense, and fiery. The old offer themselves to be transformed into something new and make room for the next generation. In either case, the sacrifices are coated in a thick layer of flammable pitch and burned alive. Such sacrifices are never restrained. Instead, they are allowed to run as they burn, just like Tlewachtli. Their ashes are then used to fertilize fields and also to heal diseases.



OMETOCHTLI--2-RABBIT

Ometochtli is the goddess of the maguey plant, oktli alcohol, and drunkenness itself. Though maize is the principle source of food in Semanawak, the maguey plant provides pretty much



everything else. Thus Ometochtli is second only to Teosinte in her popularity among the people.

Personality

Ometochtli is a combination of two things that many assume are opposites: wisdom and humor. She is a comedian who teaches as well as entertains. Her drunken antics never fail to make people laugh, but they always have some deeper lesson behind them. Unlike many gods, she is not afraid to look foolish. Most of her stories revolve around her doing something stupid so that others can learn from her bad example. There is little if any dignity about her, but somehow this makes people love and respect her even more.

In addition to her fun-loving side, Ometochtli is also very practical. Above all else, she does what works and uses whatever gets the job done. She does not care for art or ceremony—simple, well-made things are good enough for her. This is why her sacred maguey plant provides so many useful tools and materials to the humble Masewaltin. Ometochtli is the champion of the Masewaltin class. She understands their modest, everyday struggles, so she provides the durable materials they need and does all she can to bring joy to their otherwise difficult lives.

Ometochtli is not without her troublesome side, of course. Her oktli causes difficulty as well as joy, especially to those who ignore the lessons of her stories and over-indulge. She can be erratic, switching between niceness and nastiness from second to second. She starts countless fights between drunken friends and causes many alcohol-fueled accidents. Even those who escape serious troubles invariably face her wrath the morning after with hangovers and regrets.

Domain

Ometochtli is present wherever there is Fire, Water, and Truth. She is the liquid that burns, the flame that can be drunk, and the unique wisdom that comes from this combination of opposites. She is that which allows humans to see the profound humor in everyday things.

Worshipping Ometochtli

Ometochtli smiles on those who laugh when life teaches them a hard lesson. She pities those who hold grudges and worry, for she knows how much hurt Semanawak has in store for them. But she has little sympathy—after all, worries are a completely self-imposed problem. Good luck awaits those who don't hang on too tightly. All others are punished by seeing their worries come true.

Ometochtli is the ultimate source of oktli, but she still loves to receive it from worshippers. Traditionally, all oktli drinkers tip their cups and spill some onto the ground in tribute to Ometochtli. Devoted (and inebriated) worshippers toss entire cups away. These tributes can get expensive, for oktli is difficult to produce and quite costly. But Ometochtli's thirst has no limit,

and she appreciates every drop.

Human sacrifices to Ometochtli are long and drawn out. The sacrifice starts by drinking a large cup of oktli laced with other spiritually-active substances. A Priest stabs her once with a sharp maguey thorn, opening a bleeding wound. As she bleeds, the sacrifice begins speaking about anything that comes to mind: stories, wisdom, last wishes, and more. The point is simply to keep talking, and as the ritual progresses more and more truth slips out.

When the first wound stops bleeding, she drinks two more cups of oktli, and the Priest stabs her twice. She resumes her speech, this time bleeding more profusely. Each time the bleeding stops, she drinks an additional cup of oktli and gets stabbed again.

This ritual is always performed in the sacrifice's house, where family and friends gather to listen and offer support. It is an occasion of great merriment and fun, at least early on when death is still far away. The maguey stabs are grimly amusing, and the stories are still funny.

But as the number of stabs increases, the ordeal turns grim. Pain and blood loss take a toll on the sacrifice, and the alcohol begins to loosen tongues. This is when everyone must voice all of their hidden resentments and grudges. The Priest encourages everyone to be honest because this is their last chance to make peace with the sacrifice.

As the sacrifice grows weaker and death approaches, the resentments fade away and the family is pulled together as they share their loved one's last moments and thoughts. They assist her through each stab, they comfort each fear she expresses, and they say their final goodbyes and I-love-yous. Eventually, she slips away.

It is a time of great sadness and grief, but also of relief. Everything that needed to be said was said, and all true feelings were aired and laid to rest.

TLAYOMIXTLI-NIGHT CLOUD

Tlayomixtli is the god of dreams, illusions, and of the illusions people hold about the world. His power comes not from changing what is, but from changing what seems to be. There are few who rely on him fully, for he is a fickle and changeable god. But he is devoutly worshipped by artists, storytellers, dreamers, and others who realize that one's perception of the truth is at least as important as the truth itself.

Personality

Tlayomixtli is a very mysterious god. His ultimate goals are unknown, if he has any, and his loyalties shift by the moment. He is the smoke rising from a campfire that blocks out the stars and the omens they contain. Will this cause you to walk into disaster, or will it give you the courage to fight on even in the face of great odds, and perhaps overcome them? He is a mirage





in the Desert that causes the horizon to shimmer and shift. Will this lure you astray in search of phantom water, or will it keep you walking long after you would have otherwise given up?

Above all, Tlayomixtli believes that Truth is a choice. We create truth by what we choose to believe. There are a few facts in the world--the Sun in the sky, the ground beneath your feet, and the wind in your face--but most things of any importance are *decided*, not sensed objectively. Are you a strong person or are you weak? Is your sister's death a curse or a blessing? The answers to these questions are not facts. They are choices. And your truth is created by the choices you make.

There is no easy way to deal with Tlayomixtli and his riddles. He uses lies to tell the truth, and the truth to tell lies, but you can never be sure which is which. He is always contrary, and as soon as you agree with him, he switches sides and obscures the matter again. He is like a coyote following you in the Desert, ever present but always distant and uncatchable. He wants something from you, and will do many things to get it. But is it food? Water? Entertainment?

Nobody knows.

Domain

Tlayomixtli is present wherever there is Illusion, Creation, and Fire. He is ephemeral, flitting between existence and imagination. His touch has no substance, yet it profoundly affects the world. He is a process, an event. He is not something that exists--he is something that happens.

Worshipping Tlayomixtli

Tlayomixtli smiles on those who chase dreams and illusions, who see what they choose to see rather than what others tell them is really there. This leads to much hardship, both for the dreamers and for those who suffer as a result of their delusional actions. Sometimes such dreamers create nightmares. But to Tlayomixtli, the one person who succeeds in turning a dream into truth is worth the thousand failures.

Tlayomixtli accepts any offering, but only if it means something to the giver. He is more interested in the thought behind the offering than the offering itself. It is customary for worshippers to tell a story that explains why the offering is significant and what it represents. The story is the illusion you create, and if you and Tlayomixtli believe it, it becomes Truth. Truth is the true offering that the god of dreams craves.

With this in mind, Tlayomixtli has no set ritual for human sacrifice. He accepts lives as he accepts any other offering, but he doesn't demand them.

CENTER GODS

Center is the direction of self and community. It is the common thread that runs between all things. It is also the direction of duality. It is day and night, life and death, love and fear, us and them. The gods of the center are a diverse, complex group, but above all else they represent the extremes of the universe. The greatest heights, the lowest depths, and the space between them--these are the gods of the center.

WEYSITLALIN--GREAT STAR

Weysitlalin is the goddess of the current fifth Sun. She presided over the creation of humans and considers them her children. The world that exists today is hers. She is the Tonalsiwatl of the universe.

Personality

Weysitlalin is the ideal to which all rulers and citizens aspire. She is wise but open-minded, brave but humble, straight-forward and sincere but not simpleminded, and powerful but just. She is not afraid to speak, and not afraid to listen. She is selfless and rules not for her own sake but for the sake of all those who depend upon her. She is the perfect balance of authority and responsibility.

She was not always this way, however. In her youth, Weysitlalin was small and quiet. She was very wise, and almost always knew the correct solution to the problems she and the other gods encountered. But she never spoke above a whisper, because she was shy and afraid.

It wasn't until Xolokwani, the devious Moon god, almost took over the universe that Weysitlalin finally found her voice and accepted the responsibility herself. As she spoke, she was transformed from a small, shy girl into the radiant, magnificent goddess she is today. Her words still echo across Semanawak:

"The greatest cowardice is to know the way but refuse to lead others."

Weysitlalin believes in community over all other things. Individuals have an obligation to use their gifts and talents to benefit society and the world. Those who do not, whether they choose to use them selfishly or refuse to use them at all, fail in their duty to the world. Such failures sadden Weysitlalin more than they anger her, for they mean that the world loses something unique and valuable. But nevertheless she has no mercy for such individuals. They must contribute or leave.

In her rush to selflessly serve the world, however, Weysitlalin neglects to take care of herself. She requires nourishment and protection from her subjects in order to continue providing light and wisdom, and she is constantly threatened by powerful enemies. She uses her power wisely, but makes little effort to hold onto it. Instead, she relies on others to guard it for her.

In some ways this is the very heart of what makes her great. She must rule well enough that her subjects will fight to keep her in charge. Her power is tempered by her dependence on those who sustain her. But it is also a terrible vulnerability, because ultimately her empire of justice depends on the virtue of its subjects.

Weysitlalin has faith in human goodness. It remains to be seen whether this is wisdom or the most naive folly.

Domain

Weysitlalin is present wherever there is Healing, Words, and Light. She is the Sun that shines at noon, bringing warmth and illumination to the world. She is the light of the hearthfire at the center of the house, drawing the home and the community together and uniting them as one.

Worshipping Weysitlalin

Weysitlalin smiles on those who work hard for others' benefit: children who do their chores without complaint, parents who provide for their families, citizens who serve their communities, and Altepetls that protect the world. Though she loves everyone, she especially loves people who honor her love by emulating it. Those who threaten the greater good must be reclaimed if possible, and tearfully destroyed or exiled otherwise.

Weysitlalin rarely asks for anything, but she receives a dizzying array of offerings: incense, flowers, food, blood, gold, turquoise, and more. They are offered in gratitude for her life giving light, not because she demands them. Unlike most gods, she encourages Priests to use these offerings to benefit their communities, most often through charity to the poor.

The one thing Weysitlalin really needs is far dearer than the finest gold or jade jewelry. She needs the life force contained within human hearts. Without this, she will fade and plunge the world into frigid darkness and despair. She does not ask for such sacrifices, but the people of Semanawak know that their



lives depend on them.

Her sacrifice ritual is simple but profound. Those who offer themselves climb the steep stairs up to the top of her pyramid. Before they climb they are given a mixture of oktli and several other eye-opening spiritual substances which allow them to see the true wonder of the world they are dying to save. It is said that this mixture allows you to see your brave ancestors in the Sky and hear them cheering you on and reassuring you that everything will be alright.

At the top, a Priest explains to the offering, to the assembled crowd, and to the Sky itself the significance of the act: a human is dying to sustain the light and warmth of the Sun. The Priest bows and praises the bravery of the person, and then orders two other Priests to take the sacrifice and stretch him over the altar at the top.

The head Priest (often the Tlatoani or Tonalsiwatl) takes a sacred obsidian knife, raises it to the sky, and then plunges it into the offering's chest, cutting along the bottom of the ribcage to create a distinctive, crescent-shaped cut. She then reaches into the wound, pulls out the sacrifice's heart, and raises it, still beating, to the Sun so that she can drink its life and grow strong. After the heart finally stops beating, the Priest throws it into a fire, filling it with light to guide the person on his or her trip through the Underworld.



NAKOYOMIKETL--GOD OF THE DEAD

Nakoyomiketl is the god of the dead, the master of the Underworld, and the devourer of the unworthy. He was killed by Sipaktli during the creation of the world and trapped beneath her body forever. He now lurks in the darkness and waits for all who die to come before him. Those who carry light within them may pass. Those who have gone dark will be eaten and Unborn.

Personality

Nakoyomiketl is a grim, sullen, and cynical god for whom joy itself has died. Though he is immensely powerful, he lives as a prisoner in the dark and murky Underworld, forever trapped there as a result of his failure against Sipaktli. His only diversions come from spreading misery, pain, and terror throughout his realm.

If Weysitlalin represents ultimate faith in the goodness of humanity, Nakoyomiketl represents faith in its failure. To him, humans are pathetic, pitiful creatures whose entire existence is pointless. Regardless of how well or poorly they live, they always end up in the same place: the Underworld. And aside from a few exceptional individuals, they all suffer the same fate: Unbirth, the erasure of their identity from the universe.

Weysitlalin lives for such exceptions. But Nakoyomiketl knows better than any just how few there are. He eats only the failures, and therefore he is the most well-fed god in the universe. But his food gives him little pleasure or nourishment. For all he eats, he is nothing but a thin, battered skeleton. True nourishment comes from quality, not quantity.

Nakoyomiketl was not always as bitter as he is today. In the

beginning he was young, beautiful, and idealistic. He faced the terrors of the world cheerfully with a heart full of hope and optimism for the future. But that all ended when he died facing Sipaktli. His youthful skin was stripped away, leaving nothing but old bones. His hope was torn apart by her ferocious jaws. And anything that remained was smothered beneath her body, crushed by the consequences of his one failure.

Despite his nihilistic attitude, however, Nakoyomiketl serves a vital role in the universe: he releases the energy of the dead so that it can be reborn in other forms on Earth. It is said that smoke rising from the Earth is actually the breath of Nakoyomiketl, which carries the essence of creation upon it. Though it is a place of death, new life rises from the Underworld.

It is truly tragic that poor Nakoyomiketl never gets to see the beauty that this life creates. For all his power and terror, he is perhaps the one god who deserves to be pitied.

Domain

Nakoyomiketl is present wherever there is Creation, Destruction, and Death. He is there at the end and at the beginning. He is the source and the destination. He is the place where the cycle wraps around on itself.

Worshipping Nakoyomiketl

Nakoyomiketl smiles on everyone, but his is the chilling grin of a bare skull, so few seek this out. People pay tribute to the god of the dead out of fear. When illness strikes, people pray to Nakoyomiketl in hopes that he will grant them just a few more years of life. When loved ones die, mourners make offerings in hopes that Nakoyomiketl will have mercy on the dead and let them pass.

For the most part, Nakoyomiketl ignores such pathetic pleading. But every once in a while he strikes a bargain, which renews the hopes of the desperate that there is some way to sway him. Perhaps the god of death still has some mercy tucked away in some deep corner of his black, dessicated heart?

Or perhaps he just likes to watch people struggle.

The one thing that seems to earn some favor from Nakoyomiketl is proper treatment of the dead. Everyone who dies must have a proper funeral to ensure that they make their way to the Underworld. Otherwise, their souls will likely linger on Earth, which displeases the god of the dead. Nobody knows why for sure. It could be that he needs the dead to come to him. It could be that such neglect reminds him of how he was forgotten by his brothers and sisters during the battle with Sipaktli. But whatever the reason, those who remember the dead and honor them appropriately earn Nakoyomiketl's favor, whatever good it may do them.

There are no human sacrifices to Nakoyomiketl. Sooner or later, everyone comes to him.



XIMEKATL-COUNTER OF DAYS

Ximekatl is the goddess of lore, divination, time, and the calendar. She is the sage of the heavens and patron of scholars and teachers on Earth. All the gods are pieces of some great primordial vessel that shattered long ago. None can remember what it looked like before. Except for Ximekatl.

She is the goddess in the lower left corner of the Center Gods picture.

Personality

Ximekatl is extremely old, even by the gods' standards. She witnessed the birth of everything and everyone, and she remembers it all. She is neutral and dispassionate, content to watch, count, and record. But she also possesses the generous heart of a teacher, and finds great joy in sharing and passing on her knowledge, especially to young children. They find even the most basic facts fascinating, and possess the ability to make such things fascinating again to adults. But otherwise, she does not interfere. She only watches.

Ximekatl does not travel, for she can see everything from her home high up in the Sky. Those who seek her knowledge, whether they are god, spirit, or human, must come to her. But there are many ways to reach her house, and many seem to stumble across it by accident. As Ximekatl herself would say, you can find knowledge in the strangest places.

Many believe that Ximekatl knows everything. She sees how the universe fits together, how its many cycles work and how seemingly disparate events are connected. But the greatest truth she teaches is that knowledge is not discovered. It is created. And it is used, like a tool.

Take a knife, for example. How many things can you do with a knife? You can cut with it, obviously, but you can also crush things with the handle, scoop things up with the blade, tie it to

a rope and use it like a grappling hook, and so on. No matter how many uses you discover, you will never discover them all because you are not actually discovering them. You are creating them, and there is no limit to creation or invention. There are some things that you cannot do with a knife, of course. You cannot carry cargo in a knife, or use it to fly. But this is merely the shape of infinity.

Ximekatl has created many tools for understanding: the calendar, blood reading, astrology, and more. She continues to refine these tools so that they are more useful. Today you can use a calendar to predict the changing seasons, plan a war far in advance, and calculate when a woman is likely to become pregnant. Some have learned how to use it to predict the movements of stars hundreds of years in advance. Who knows what uses will be invented tomorrow?

Domain

Ximekatl is present wherever there is Lore, Glyphs, and Time. Her knowledge makes her essentially omnipresent, able to pierce any barriers of time and distance. Her pulse is the pulse of time itself, the rhythm of the great cosmic clock. She did not create time. But she measures it, and she uses it.

Worshipping Ximekatl

Ximekatl smiles on those who increase knowledge. Whether they are crafters, farmers, artists, or writers, their efforts to create new knowledge and new tools for gaining knowledge mirror her own and fill her heart with happiness.

Despite her vast understanding, Ximekatl enjoys simple offerings. She loves candy and sweets. She also enjoys comfortable clothes and anything else that would ease the life of an old woman.

Ximekatl does not demand many human sacrifices, but she does ask for a few people to share the burden of eternity with her. Sacrifices consume a drink made from the sap of an obscure vine from the Jungle to the south. This sap is a powerful hallucinogen and it grants many visions, but it is most notable for its effect on the perception of time. Those who consume it report that time seems to slow down or even stop entirely, and that they are able to live for days or even years in a single instant. But the sap also contains a lethal poison, and anything more than a taste is fatal. For this ritual, sacrifices consume an entire cup.

To outside observers, the drinker seems to pass away just a short time after drinking. But it is believed that, by dying under the effect of the time sap, the drinker breaks free of time itself and goes on to dwell in the house of Ximekatl, where she may aid the lore goddess and share in the wonders that she witnesses.

Priests mummify the bodies of sacrifices in cotton shrouds and seal them deep in the tombs beneath Ximekatl's temple so it can live there forever, counting the days alongside the goddess.

KAKAYAWANI GODS

Though all gods are dangerous, none are as feared as the Kakayawani gods. The ruling gods of the Kakayawani Empire were introduced to the Valley during Kakayawani rule before the lighting of the New Fire. They are still worshipped in the city of Teoyezteko, but most people in the Valley consider them dangerous beings to be guarded against, not called upon.

The Kakayawani gods are not evil. They cause destruction and mischief, and many of them want to overthrow the Sun to bring about the end of the world. But they have their place. They are part of the balanced conflict that holds the universe together and drives its essential cycles. They are the night that counters the day; without them, the Sun would burn the world with its warmth.

The Kakayawani gods are like the jaguar. The jaguar is a powerful predator with deadly teeth and claws. It is capable of slipping invisibly through the countryside, and its nature is to hunt, kill, and devour. There is no evil or malice about this--it is simply what it does. Jaguars are important because they control the numbers of the animals they prey upon. They may kill humans if humans get in the way, but they also kill other creatures that cause problems for humans. They are dangerous, but they are an essential part of the universe, and if you understand them you can deal with them safely.

All but one of the Kakayawani gods belong to a group known as the Tzitzimime (Star Demons). They are the sisters of the Sun and also her eternal enemies. They seek to overthrow her and end the current age because they believe she is an unworthy ruler whose creation is fatally flawed. They are the ultimate force of change and of evolution. They are the inevitable destruction that accompanies progress.

It is important to understand that the people of the Empire view these gods differently than the Kakayawani do. The Empire sees them as gods of disaster because they bring disaster to the Empire. But to the Kakayawani, they are the sustainers of life and power and the promise of a bright future.

Today's world is ruled by the Tonalteka, just as the previous ages were ruled by the Fire People, the Stone People, the Water People, and the Wind People. The Sun of each age was overthrown and its people destroyed. It was a disaster for the people who died, but it was also the act of creation from which the next race of people emerged.

Perhaps the Kakayawani are waiting to be that next race. Or perhaps they are the remnants of the previous race.

AYOTINI-LAST BREATH

Ayotini is the goddess of stillness and silence, the one who steals the wind, snuffs out brave words, and stops people from breathing. She lurks in the Eastern Skies at night, where she floats silently in the black spaces between the stars.



Personality

Ayotini is infinitely patient. She encourages her enemies to fight against her and expend their energy in futile resistance. The harder they fight, the sooner they tire, and the sooner stillness and silence descend upon them. She is calm, calculating, and impossible to anger or please. Whether she wins or loses, it is the same: perfect silence, perfect stillness.

Ayotini is probably the least malicious of the Tzitzimime. She creates silence and stillness not for vengeance or cruelty, but because she truly believes that they are the true states of perfection. Sound indicates a disturbance: pain and pleasure, anger and joy, questions and answers. Without sound, there is no disturbance. Motion indicates an imbalance--a jaguar seeking food, a river seeking the ocean, the wind seeking a destination. Without motion, there is no desire, and balance is achieved.

Ayotini is detached, logical, and thoughtful. She sees the world more clearly than any other, and she is almost never wrong. Her calm is a good antidote to the raging emotions that so often consume the world. Her logic is superior to the fear and misguided superstition of so many. Many wise ones would agree with her on virtually every point.

Yet her ultimate conclusion is that the world is too flawed to survive, and must be destroyed...

Domain

Ayotini is found wherever there is Stillness, Silence, Breath, and Perception. She is the whisper in the night that convinces you to stop breathing, the oppressive silence that makes you afraid to utter a word, and the troubling truths that arrive during the night. But she is also the goddess of clarity, insight, and objectivity. She seldom brings happiness. But she is almost never wrong.

Worshipping Ayotini

Despite her malevolent designs, many call upon Ayotini in times of turmoil and confusion. Sometimes the winds blow too fiercely, and sometimes the cheers are too loud. Sometimes everything changes too quickly, and sometimes life overwhelms you. In these times, Ayotini's presence is a blessing. She surrounds the world like a great flood held back by the noisy distractions of the day. By removing such distractions, you invite her in. In many ways she is not summoned--you simply remove the barriers keeping her away.

Long periods of silence delight Ayotini, so her worshippers seek quiet seclusion and meditation. The time sacrificed in such pursuits suffices in place of any material offering. Priests who honor her may also breathe and exhale smoke, or journey to places cold enough that breath is visible--these sacrifices of breath and breathing please Ayotini. It is said that if smoke appears to freeze in mid-air, she has accepted your offering.

But it also means you will die of suffocation in the night, when she comes to claim it permanently.

Human sacrifices to Ayotini are performed in silence. There are no speeches or dances. There is no cheering or weeping. Priests wordlessly slit a sacrifice's throat with a knife bearing the face of Ayotini. They leave the body out for four days as tribute to the goddess and her vision of the future. After four days, the Priests silently bury it.

WAKIKOATL--DRY SERPENT

Wakikoatl is the goddess of famine and drought. She is the ocean of thirst kept at bay by the gods of rain. She is that which opposes all things that grow. She prowls the Southern Skies at night, as hungry as the black void of the beyond.

Personality

Wakikoatl is much like a creature suffering during a famine: desperate and willing to take tremendous risks. She is a starving wolf snapping at the heels of a farmer, a thirsty deer coming to the water where caimans wait, and an escaped convict determined to remain free. She lies, cheats, steals, kills, and betrays without hesitation if she feels it will get ahead. She does not have friends--she has competitors. She is a constant danger that can never be permanently averted. Constant vigilance merely keeps her at bay.

Despite her loathsome traits, Wakikoatl is the embodiment of ambition and desire. She is eternally hungry and utterly unafraid. Ambitious people turn to her because she understands



their drive like nobody else. Wakikoatl is both an inspiration and a warning. Hunger makes gods and people great, but it also destroys them.

Wakikoatl's vision is a world without restraint, sentiment, or empty pretensions of honor. It is a world of honest savagery where pursuit of hunger is the highest ideal. She loathes those who lie about their true desires, because they are the bringers of false hope. Some people can deny their hungers for a time, but it is impossible for everybody to do so, and this is what ultimately dooms the world. True balance comes not from peace but from equal, opposing forces. When there is finally no peace and no honor, there will be balance.

Domain

Wakikoatl is present wherever there is Hunger, Thirst, Fatigue, and Blood. Everyone and everything in the world is incomplete. They are all merely pieces of some great shattered Whole. Wakikoatl is the embodiment of this incompleteness, and of the desire to satisfy it.

Worshipping Wakikoatl

Wakikoatl smiles on those who shamelessly indulge their darker natures. She loves people who take what they want without remorse and those who act on their desires. Genuine selfishness is the only true honor--all others are lying hypocrites and cowards too squeamish to do what they want. They are prisoners. Ultimately, Wakikoatl smiles only on the free.

Anything taken from another is an acceptable offering to Wakikoatl. Whether it was gained by theft or by force does not matter. The act of taking itself honors Wakikoatl and brings her great pleasure.

Human sacrifices to Wakikoatl are terrifying events that haunt the nightmares of people across Semanawak. Packs of Priests possessed by Wakikoatl's hunger prowl through the cities and villages at night in search victims. Those they catch must offer something to satisfy their hunger--food, jewels, or anything else of value. The Priests greedily wolf down any food and immediately pulverize anything else so that they can throw it to Wakikoatl lurking in the shadows as they continue their rampage. Those who cannot satisfy the Priests are tied down and eaten alive, both flesh and bone. Nothing remains of such unfortunate individuals except a great deal of blood and the echoes of screams ringing through the night.



CHOKANANTZIN-WEeping MOTHER

Chokanantzin is the queen of the Tzitzimime. She is the goddess of dusk, revenge, and jealousy, the mother of unrest and discontent, the agony that seeks an end in change. She is the grief that leads not to acceptance, but to vengeance. She presides over the Western Skies at night, extinguishing the stars one by one with her bitter tears.

Personality

Chokanantzin lives for spite. She feels sadness whenever another is happy, loss whenever another gains something, and fury whenever another finds peace. She has lost everything, and therefore all others must share her fate. Her tears are poison, both to her and to the world, and they wither everything they touch lest someone else somehow find happiness because of it.

Chokanantzin hates her sister Weysitlalin, the Sun goddess. In her eyes, Weysitlalin is a fraud and a failure, but the exact

reasons vary with each story. In some stories, Weysitlalin destroys Chokanantzin's house in order to make room for Lake Ketzalatezkatl, and Chokanantzin's bitter tears fill it in. In others, Weysitlalin becomes pregnant with Teoxotlani, which fills Chokanantzin with jealousy because her own child was lost during birth. In still others, Weysitlalin orders the death of Chokanantzin's son or daughter for the greater good. Regardless, the offense is always legitimate, and Chokanantzin rises up to seek vengeance.

In order to avenge her loss, Chokanantzin strives to take everything from her sister. She conspires with Xolokwani to take away her light during eclipses. She tries to kill off Weysitlalin's son, Teoxotlani, both for revenge and to leave Weysitlalin unprotected. And she preys upon Weysitlalin's humans by stealing and killing their children in a perverse effort to achieve retribution and gain children of her own.

The oppressed admire Chokanantzin and refer to her as "The Lady Who Stared into the Sun and Saw Darkness." But the tragedy of Chokanantzin is that her righteous indignation poisons her and leaves her unable to think of anything else. She cannot let go of her loss, and therefore loses everything. At least that is what the Tonalteka say...

Though none of the Tzitzimime are particularly stable, Chokanantzin is by far the most dangerous and psychotic of them all. She has no rational motives. She is unreasoning pain unleashed. The other Tzitzimime each have some desire for a new world. It invariably requires the end of the current one, but they have something new they are working towards. Not Chokanantzin. She seeks an end to pain, and therefore she seeks nothingness itself.

Domain

Chokanantzin is present wherever there is Desire, Destruction, and Pain. She is a wound that cannot heal, a grudge that cannot be forgiven, and the unending agony that pours forth from these things.

Worshipping Chokanantzin

Chokanantzin blesses those who weep with anger at their losses, and those who rage against injustice. People who gain her favor see their enemies perish in anguish and despair. But she cannot stomach those who have no enemies or grudges. She abandons them the moment they allow themselves to feel satisfied.

Spoils of war are the most common offerings to Chokanantzin. Though commanders discourage it, there is always looting during an Angry War. Much of this loot is offered to Chokanantzin. This appeases the goddess of vengeance, but it also allows the looters to deal with personal revenge.

People often lose friends and family in war, but many times there is no satisfying vengeance to be had. The war ends, the enemy retreats, or the loss is simply too great. Without some



sort of release, these feelings of injustice ferment and poison a person, just as Chokanantzin's obsessive grief poisons her. Therefore, people take things during looting and offer them to Chokanantzin as symbols of the vengeance they achieved. This allows them give their hate to Chokanantzin to bear, and gives them permission to honorably let go.

Cities offer humans sacrifices to Chokanantzin more to keep her at bay than to win her favor, but they are among the most difficult sacrifices, because Chokanantzin only accepts children. The children are taken to her temple in the night and quietly told about the fate that awaits them until they cry--tears are a sign that the Weeping Mother has arrived to claim her offering. Their throats are then slit.

Such offerings assuage Chokanantzin's grief, at least for a short time, and cause her to spare a community from her wrath. They are crucial to the survival of the Empire, for without them Chokanantzin's anger would be unendurable. But they cause terrible pain to the family and to the community.

The one comfort people can take is that the sacrificed children will be loved forever with tender devotion by Chokanantzin in her dark corner of the sky. She will never find peace in her stolen motherhood. But she will try harder than any other god or human mother.



SESEKMIKWIZTLI--COLD DEATH

Sesekmikwiztli is the goddess of frost and fear. She is the bringer of death in the night, the stealer of warmth and life from humans and plants alike. She haunts the Northern Skies at night, bringing the unimaginable cold of the dark void with her wherever she goes.

Personality

Sesekmikwiztli is a restless goddess with a heart full of icy fear. She is running from something and cannot bear to remain in one place for long. It lives in cities and towns, waiting in buildings and codices. If she keeps moving, she is safe. But as the world fills up with more people and more settlements, there are fewer and fewer wild places where she can escape.

The thing that Sesekmikwiztli fears is human knowledge. As human civilization progresses, people learn more and more about the world and how to control it. Long ago, humans did not seek such control. They simply walked about, accepting what the world had to offer and dying when it offered no more. But as humans learned, they began to understand the forces that shape and drive the world, and how to manipulate them to their own ends. Over time they learned how to make plants grow where they wanted, water flow where they directed it, and fire burn at their command. Who knows what powers they will gain in the future?

Most gods find it gratifying that humans have embraced the world and learned how to live better lives within it. So long as humans respect the world and use it wisely, they are welcome to it. But Sesekmikwiztli fears their increasing power, fears the day when humans grow beyond the limits of the gods and nature. Today, humans must respect natural law, for if they do not, they die. But what will happen to gods and nature when natural law becomes not a law, but a choice?

Sesekmikwiztli does not want to find out. Therefore, she seeks to bring about the ruin or corruption of all cultures in Seman-awak. In her world, civilization must either die or become savage and stagnant. Knowledge is the key to human power, and therefore it must be obscured, destroyed, and halted. Only then will the universe survive.

Domain

Sesekmikwiztli is present wherever there is Cold, Fear, and Destruction. The chill of Sesekmikwiztli's fear of progress is bitter and terrifying, and she brings it with her wherever she goes. It is the weapon with which she strikes out against human civilization, humbling and crippling it. Crops that intrude upon nature are destroyed by frost, those with new ideas are plagued by suspicion and fear, and any who wield or are destined to wield power must take care to keep their windows closed at night, lest Sesekmikwiztli come in and freeze the life from them while they sleep.

Worshipping Sesekmikwiztli

Sesekmikwiztli smiles on all who live simply. She loves hunters, gatherers, and nomads because they accept the limits of the land and live as part of it. They do not pry into the secrets of the universe of try to make the world obey them. They do not inspire her fear, and therefore she can treat them with kindness.

But farmers, miners, artisans, and those who command them are her eternal enemies. They have embarked on the path to



destruction, and must be controlled with cruelty. She does not fear what they are today. She fears what they may become in years to come, and does everything she can to slow them down.

Sesekmikwiztli craves offerings of codices, calendars, farm fields, and all such signs of human knowledge and manipulation. Her worshippers destroy these offerings by exposing them to the weather or by burning them (Sesekmikwiztli finds it gloriously ironic when the creations of civilization are corrupted towards its destruction).

Human sacrifices to Sesekmikwiztli are either willing disciples who wish to fuel her crusade against civilization or thinkers, crafters, or leaders who advance the power of humans through knowledge. Offerings are brought to a cold place, usually either a mountaintop or a place out in the desert at night, and left there to freeze to death. As the cold takes them, they share Sesekmikwiztli's icy fear and perish with her whispering laughter in their ears.



XOLOKWANI-BALD ONE

Xolokwani is the god of the Moon and of lies, deception, and discord. He is Weysitlalin's brother and once sought to become the Sun. But he was too cowardly, and thus became the Moon, which can only reflect the light of others and only shines bright when surrounded by darkness. He is the father of the Tzitzimime, the King of the Kakayawani gods, and the master of mischief in Semanawak.

Personality

Xolokwani lives to cause problems. He is a cruel-hearted trickster who survives by theft, lies, and misfortune. Many have died because of him, and much of the tension in the world today was caused by him. But he is also a very complex and rather tragic god, because he does not cause all this trouble on purpose. It is simply his nature (though, to be fair, he does cause a fair amount of it on purpose).

Xolokwani possesses Semanawak's most reviled vices. He is lazy, selfish, cowardly, squeamish, dirty, poorly-spoken, dishonest, and promiscuous, and his vices always get him into trouble. Yet many of the greatest events in history would not have occurred without Xolokwani's vices.

He stole the bones of the people of the first four Suns in hopes that he could pass them off as his own creation. His motive was selfish, and his trickery was uncovered and punished. But these bones ended up being used to create humans. Without them, it would have been impossible.

Xolokwani had the opportunity to become the Sun, but he was too cowardly to step into the sacred fire that would transform him. He tried three times, and each time stopped at the last moment. Weysitlalin was so disgusted that she found the courage to speak up and share her wisdom. She ran ahead of him and leaped into the fire herself, thereby becoming the wisest, noblest Sun ever to shine over Semanawak. Xolokwani's cowardice was deplorable, but without it she would not have been inspired to do better.

Xolokwani symbolizes the importance of being true to one's nature, because even the vile have an important role to play in the cycles of time. He is the ultimate bad example that everyone learns from, the enemy that everyone unites against. Nobody likes him, but without him the world would be incomplete. Weysitlalin brings light, Elopatiliztli brings rain, and Ehekamitotiani brings wind. Xolokwani brings vice, and it is just as important as any of these other things.

He is not without a sympathetic side, of course. He was born to be hated, and many stories emphasize the tragedy of that position and his futile attempts to escape it. Also, some of his mischief is very funny, especially when it befalls someone who deserves it. Many of his stories affectionately portray him as a lovable scoundrel who hilariously breaks all the social rules and punishes those who take themselves too seriously. Some even hint at some desire to do good--he did create the dog, after all, the truest and most loving companion humanity has ever known.

But though his hijinx can be amusing, never forget that Xolokwani is the reason why humans hate and kill each other. His Whispers created suspicion, jealousy, fear, and prejudice, and their echoes may yet doom the human race. *And he did it because he thought it would be fun to watch.*

He also fathered the Tzitzimime, the ones who seek to bring about the end of the world. It was an accident, a fleeting combination of petty revenge and thoughtless sexual lust. But it ended up creating the very embodiments of doom.

The greatest villains do not look like villains, nor do they look like heroes. Instead, they look and act like harmless buffoons. They will not make you afraid, at least not at first. You will laugh at them and pity them, and convince yourself that they



don't really mean any harm, and couldn't possibly hurt you even if they did. It is not until afterwards, when your life lies in ruin and you realize that you truly have nothing else to live for, that you will fear them.

And Xolokwani aspires to be the greatest villain of all...

Domain

Xolokwani is found wherever there is Discord, Theft, and Darkness. He is the Moon that steals the light of the Sun, creates darkness to make himself look brighter, and smiles down upon a world in turmoil.

Worshipping Xolokwani

Xolokwani smiles on those who cause trouble and those who are blamed for trouble. He loves a good ruckus, and those who prove adept at starting them will receive his blessing. He also has a deep sympathy for those who suffer the disapproval of society, regardless of whether they deserve it.

Xolokwani demands a cut of everything that is stolen. Thieves who pay him his due will enjoy his blessings. Their lies will be more believable, their trails will be harder to follow, and they will always manage to slip away into the night when the constables come looking for them. But those who hold out on the Moon god will find just the opposite, and will likely end up dead or exiled before long.



Xolokwani's sacrifice ritual takes an entire year to perform. A war captive (ideally a Kakayawani) is selected, shaved bald, and dressed in Xolokwani's sacred garments. This ixipta is then set loose on the city for the entire year to live literally as the god of mischief and discord. He may steal and murder without punishment, he may have sex with whomever he wishes, and he may blatantly violate any social rules without fear of reprisal. He may not leave the city or enter temples or government palaces, but otherwise he has total freedom.

People are not helpless against his mischief, however. They are not required to obey him. They escape his advances, hide their valuables from him, and try to bargain with or appease him. The entire city provides a lavish residence and servants to keep him amused. This is an important part of the ritual: the city learns to accept and deal with Xolokwani's mischief, rather than futilely trying to shut it out. It also satisfies Xolokwani with "safe" mischief--if he is content with petty crime, he won't perpetrate greater disasters like diseases or family feuds.

But no matter how obnoxious he may be, no matter how many taboos he breaks, he is still a god, and any who harm him are immediately executed. He is constantly followed by a group of sacred servants and protectors who will defend him from those he angers or carefully wrestle him to the ground if he tries to leave the city or violate a sacred space.

At the end of the year, the ixipta is beaten, tied up, and brought

to the courtyard before Xolokwani's temple. He is placed on a special elevated platform which is then surrounded by a huge, thick ring of wood, pitch, and various other flammable materials. The ring is then ignited, trapping him inside a massive fire that represents the sacred flame at Tleteoshiwakan, which, according to the story, revealed Xolokwani's cowardice when he couldn't jump into it or through it.

Tradition states that, if the ixipta escapes the ring of fire, mischief itself escapes, and the city will be ruled by misfortune and misery for the following year. Therefore, the Priests make sure that the ring of fire is wide and hot enough to contain him. The ixipta may either try to get through this fire (and likely die in the attempt), or he may wait on the platform for the heat and smoke to overcome him. Either way, his death signifies the death of mischief for the year.

SPIRITS

Everything in Semanawak has a life force to it. A tree, a rock, a river, an animal--they all have a consciousness. This consciousness is a spirit. Spirits do not often see the world the same way as humans. They often seem to be "sleeping," or facing other directions than humans. But when a spirit awakens, it becomes fully active and fully conscious, and can be very dangerous and unpredictable.

Spirits are not gods, though the line between them can be rather subtle. Spirits often possess magic and can be extremely powerful and dangerous. They may inhabit other levels of the Universe. There are even people who offer tribute and sacrifices to some spirits much as they do to gods. "God" and "Spirit" are vague terms used more for convenience than for any technical purposes. It would not be unreasonable to say that a god is simply a very powerful, widely-respected spirit.

However, just as most humans aren't Tlatoanis, most spirits are nowhere near as powerful as a god. Many are actually quite small and modest, and are less powerful than humans. And confusing such a spirit with a god would be like confusing a slave with a Tlatoani.

A good rule of thumb is this: humans see gods as their "superiors", and spirits as their "peers". Gods are thunderstorms, rain, wind, and other natural forces of such power that they cannot even be approached. Spirits are individual plants, animals, rocks, and things of this nature. They live, they die, and they can be touched and killed. Spirits are fellow inhabitants of the universe, whereas gods are the rulers of the universe.

There are actually many similarities between humans and spirits. Spirits also worship the gods. Their rituals are different, and they may even have their own gods who are as yet unknown to humans. But they are at the mercy of the same powerful beings, and likewise seek to gain their favor and avoid their wrath.

While spirits may have abilities that humans lack, humans pos-





Gods are elements of the setting. Spirits are characters within that setting. Almost no human ever speaks to a god, because one thunderclap from the god's lips would forever deafen human ears. But many humans speak to spirits.

Spirits are the NPCs of the spiritual world. Gods are the terrain features.

sess their own abilities that most other spirits lack--rock spirits live for countless ages, wolf spirits have scent and tracking powers, and humans have knowledge like calendars, farming, and atlats. You might say that humans are just another type of spirit, just another form that the sacred energy has assumed.

Humans have complicated relationships with each other--family, community, allies, enemies, rivals, and so on. The relationships between humans and spirits are just as complicated. Individual humans vary greatly--some are kind, some are nasty, some are generous, some are greedy, and most have a complex mix of these traits. This is also true of spirits. Most are decent enough and simply want to get along, but some can be just as cruel, power-hungry, dishonest, and vengeful as any human. Conflicts between humans and spirits are common, and may be provoked by either side.

However, it is important to remember that, in most cases, spirits don't really care about humans. They have their own lives to live, and their own places in the world to explore. Humans don't think much about the lives of ants crawling on the street, and likewise those ants don't think much about the lives of humans walking down those streets. In most cases they probably don't even notice each other. It is only when one intrudes upon the world of the other that they come together. Thus, spirit activity is usually a sign that something is amiss.

EXAMPLES OF SPIRITS IN SEMANAWAK

Here are a few spirits that you can use in your stories and as inspiration for designing your own spirit characters.

XUNAN KAB [ROYAL LADY], THE GREAT BEE SPIRIT OF WIKTLAN

Everything in the Jungle has a role to perform. The tallest trees reach towards the Sun. They gather her light and transform it into delicious fruit and leaves. The insects and worms dig through the litter below. They clear away the clutter and transform it into fertile, life-giving soil. The birds sail through the skies. They fill the forest with song, color, and beauty. The monkeys chatter in the tree tops. They provide unending comedy and laughter.

All of these things live in the Jungle. But it is the bees that make the Jungle live.

Bees are the spark of life within the forest. They are its blood,

its breath, and its soul. Each buzzing individual is a word, a thought. Each hive is a mind, a master, and a guide to all things living around it. They spread love from flower to flower, forge alliances between plants and spirits, and bind the entire world together. They have a magic to them. They are the many who are one. They are the true gardeners of the Jungle.

Some of the Alka'balum believe, as the Tonalteka do, that the Sun is a great shining Priestess of light whose wisdom and warmth bring life and civilization to the world. But there are many who believe that the Sun is a great beehive in the sky, for only bees could bring such life to the world. There is much evidence to support this--after all, even earthly beehives are full of honey, a golden nectar that could come from nowhere else but heaven!

Most of the bees of the Jungle are benevolent and selfless. They work hard and share their bounty with the other creatures. They do not hoard. Instead, they simply make sure that there is enough for everybody. And they never cause harm, for, unlike the bees of other lands, Semanawak bees do not have stingers.

But there is one place that is very different from the rest of the forest. The trees are few and far between, because the people have cleared them to make way for maize fields. The Sun shines harshly upon the dry and hardened soil. There are no flowers and little fruit. Everything is oddly still, stagnant, and quiet. You can still hear the macaws squawking in the distance, but they seldom venture into the clearings. They simply watch from the trees, gathering like an audience awaiting a performance or a mob watching a building burn.

But the strangest thing about this place is that, unlike everywhere else in the Jungle, the bees have stingers. Other bees are farmers. These ones are Warriors.

The place is known as Wiktlan, the Place of Spades. And something is very, very wrong there.

The people of Wiktlan are secretive, evasive, and unwelcoming. They share little with outsiders and avoid them as much as possible. Their village is a popular stop on the trade routes into the Jungle, but few linger there because of the uncomfortable atmosphere. Those that do, however, may hear whispered conversations about something known as Xunan Kab.

Xunan Kab is a powerful spirit that lives somewhere to the south of Wiktlan. But unlike most spirits, Xunan Kab doesn't have a single body. Instead, she has thousands of buzzing, stinging bodies that swarm through the forest like a great flood. She is a great beehive spirit, and she is very displeased with the people of Wiktlan.

Most of the time you will only see a few of Xunan Kab's bodies. They fly from place to place as if on patrol. They are highly ag-





gressive, and if they see you they will give chase without hesitation. They are not difficult to escape, but the farther south you go the more of them you encounter. Journey far enough, and you will eventually be stung.

A single sting is a painful nuisance, but the real danger comes soon after. The venom attracts other bees like a beacon. It makes you much more visible to the wandering patrols, and it emanates a smell that lures them in from far away. A few more stings will make you dizzy and slow and that much more attractive to the swarm. Before long, you will be engulfed by a frenzied cloud and literally drowned in a thousand drops of burning, agonizing venom.

Nobody knows for sure where Xunan Kab's hive is, but there are stories of a great barren patch far to the south, of a gray and dusty wound in the Jungle that resembles a section of desert with all the color removed. The soil is a fine powder that chokes those who inhale it and causes them to cough up blood. The trees have all fallen and crumbled away, except for a single giant log in the center that seems to inhale and exhale clouds of bees. If Xunan Kab does indeed still have a hive-body, this is likely where it is.

Several people have gone south in search of the hive. Some have gone to discover the source of Xunan Kab's anger in hopes that she might be appeased. Others have gone in search of her honey, certain that the nectar of such a powerful being must contain great power itself. Most do not return, but occasionally Xunan Kab sends someone back.

These unfortunate individuals are known as Walking Hives by the people of Wiktlan, and they are terrifying to behold. They are pale and gray as though all the blood has been drained from them. Their eyes are wide and their mouths hang slack and open as if they are looking upon some horror that only they can see. A maddening buzzing sound accompanies their approach. Whenever they see other humans they begin babbling madly about "traitors," and "usurpers" as they slowly approach with outstretched hands.

Nobody knows what happens if they catch you, because nobody has ever allowed that to happen. But as soon as people retreat or attack, the Walking Hive lets out a blood-curdling shriek and a cloud of bees pour forth from its body, leaving it torn and riddled with thousands of tiny holes, like a bit of human honeycomb.

Smoke and magic have kept Xunan Kab at bay for a long time now, but how can there be any sort of victory against something so powerful? Surely, the only way to achieve peace is to discover what has offended her and what she wants.

But who in Semanawak is brave enough to do what is necessary to understand the alien mind of a raging swarm?

KOANANTZIN [MOTHER SNAKE], SAGE BENEATH THE EARTH

Koanantzin is a Siwateteo, a spirit of a woman who died during childbirth, whose knowledge of the Underworld has made her famous across both the spirit and human worlds. Those who die take many secrets with them--crafting knowledge, magic, hidden history, and more. It is said that the solutions to all the world's problems lie beneath the ground in the murmurings of the dead. Koanantzin is one who hears these murmurings, and offers them to the newly born. For a price.

Expectant mothers sometimes seek her out in order to petition for aid on behalf of their unborn children. Those who gain her attention might hear Koanantzin's voice in their ears during labor, suggesting auspicious names and revealing secret rituals to ensure the child's safety and success. Koanantzin also whispers to the newborn children themselves, passing on the dark but powerful lore of the Underworld. Many great Priests, Warriors, and Tlatoanis are said to owe their cleverness to such first-day lesson from Koanantzin.

This instruction is not free, however. Koanantzin remembers every newborn that has benefitted from her assistance, and demands payment in the form of future favors. Sometimes the favors are minor--a farmer might be required to keep a stone statue of Koanantzin beneath his field, allowing her to nurse energy from the roots. Other times they are more substantial--a Priest might be required to bring the skulls of all sacrifices to Koanantzin's home so that she can more easily speak to them and learn their secrets. In rare cases, they are positively crippling--a Tlatoani might be required to wage an entire war at Koanantzin's request, or face her terrifying wrath in the night. Regardless, Koanantzin always claims her due.

This sometimes comes as quite a surprise to the grown up child, however. The deal is forged by the mother, and it is up to her to inform her child of the debt that will have to be repaid. Koanantzin does not care if the mother dies before telling her child, or if she forgets. She will ask for what she is owed, or she will take it all back. After all, the dead know just as many ways to wither success as they do to sow it.

Koanantzin resides in a long-dormant volcano in the foothills of the Choka Mountains to the west. The volcano is riddled with countless twisting tunnels that afford Koanantzin a great deal of privacy and security from intruders. Most who seek her do not venture much further than the base of the volcano, where they leave their initial offerings upon a large flat stone. Particularly determined or foolish visitors might find the caves' flower-lined entrance a bit further up. Koanantzin has, on occasion, allowed visitors to meet with her in her outer areas of her labyrinth, but no one is ever permitted to follow her into the lower caverns.

It is said that these caverns contain an entrance to the Underworld (or an exit from it, depending on how you look at it), and that this is where most of Koanantzin's great knowledge comes from. If true, it is small wonder why she guards it so fiercely. Of



course, you may also consider it a favor that she would prevent you from plunging into such a deadly place.

Nobody knows for sure who Koanantzin was during her life. As a Siwateteo she was once a human mother who died during the battle of birth, but all such traces seem to have vanished from her current form. Some say that she was once a Tonalteka lady who sacrificed her life to bring one of many famous figures into the world (everybody has a different Tlatoani, Tonal-siwatl, or Priestess they point to as Koanantzin's "real" child). Others say that she was once a member of one of the Bleeding Foot kalpultin in the countryside around Popokatetlan, for her home is very near their main village, and the villagers there go to great lengths to keep her appeased (they are the ones who maintain the entrance to her volcano). Still others say that she was First Woman, the mother of all Tonalteka who, according to some stories, died while giving birth to the first Tlatoani of Tlatoxwkan. But nobody really knows for sure. Perhaps not even Koanantzin...

TASSEL, THE SPILLED MAIZE SPIRIT

Some spirits live for eons. Tree spirits may watch entire civilizations come and go, while some rock spirits may not even be aware that humans exist yet because they were in the middle of blinking when humans were born and have not yet finished opening their eyes.

But maize spirits do not live long at all. They are born at the start of the Wet Season, they sprout and give birth to their ear-children, and then the humans come to steal the children away and leave the corn village tattered and dying. The few seeds that survive to be planted next year tell the tale to their children and pray to Teosinte to spare them from the grinding bowl.

Most maize spirits accept this fate. They focus on the glorious months of the Wet Season, when all is young and fresh and the pollen of love is in the air. Each grain of pollen is like a love letter, like a tender kiss. Romance is the refuge of the maize spirits, the tantalizing game of finding your true love within an entire world of maize stalks and making the most of the few fleeting months you have together.

But not Tassel.

Like most maize spirits, Tassel was ripped from her mother's arms by the harvestors and thrown roughly into a huge basket along with countless other crying seed children. It was a twist of luck that she was not sacrificed to the human god of hunger--the hand of the cooking priest just barely missed her after claiming all her sisters. But she saw the whole gruesome ritual through the open top of the bag.

Her sisters were first left to dry in the Sun for days. Their cries gradually faded away into a strangled, thirsty silence as they became parched and hard as little pebbles. Then, after their ability to scream had been taken away, they were soaked in caustic lime solution until their skins fell off. It was almost

merciful when they finally died by being ground into dust between two hard stones.

According to the old seeds, the human cooking priests use this corn dust to make their food, and it is supposedly an honor to meet this end. But unfortunately Tassel's sisters did not even receive this empty dignity.

Before the cooking priest could take the corn dust from the grinding bowl, her disgusting mate came home. The two spoke briefly and then took off their skins and engaged in the vulgar travesty of love that the old seeds say is the human equivalent of pollen courtship. But there was none of the thoughtful exchange of ideas, none of the modesty, none of the tenderness. It was naked lust, and during this vile act they knocked the grinding bowl over! The corn dust of Tassel's entire family fell to the dirty floor, and after she finished with her mate the cooking priest unceremoniously swept it up and threw it out.

It was at that moment that Tassel swore vengeance.

The next season has begun. Tassel has been planted in the field where she was born and is well on her way to growing into a tall, beautiful corn stalk. But she has a plan for the humans! She has forged many alliances with the neighboring spirits--a rock spirit near the banks of the nearby canal, a water spirit within the canal, and a caiman spirit downstream a ways. They are all sympathetic to her situation, and angry at the humans for their own reasons. And they are all ready.

If the harvestors try to take her children, they will fall into the canal and either drown or die in the mouth of the fearsome caiman. The others will find their torn and broken bodies on the shore, rotting in the Sun and defiled by vultures.

Only then will they know her pain. Only then will vengeance be hers!

PRIESTS

Everybody in the Empire makes offerings to the gods and participates in religious rituals. But Priests are those who dedicate their lives to such things. They open themselves up to the gods, invite them into their bodies, and release their miraculous powers on Earth. They also carry the worship of humans up to the gods. They are bridges between the mortal and divine worlds. They are the voice of the gods on Earth, and the voice of humans in Heaven.

It takes a special strength to be a Priest because, for most humans, contact with the divine is lethal. When ordinary people invite a god into themselves, the power of the god consumes them like flames consuming dry grass. This is what *ixiptas* do, and that is why being an *ixipta* is a sacrifice--they burn to make the gods' light brighter. Ordinary people cannot even look directly at a god's idol without risking blindness, madness, sickness, and countless other afflictions. It's not because the gods are cruel and try to harm them. Their souls simply





cannot withstand the awesome might of the divine presence.

Priests are those with the ability to endure this presence. They can carry the gods without being consumed by them. They can live near idols without going mad. They can speak and listen to them without being deafened or muted. Priests are humans with the power to stare into the Sun without going blind.

If the gods are fire and normal humans are grass being burned in that fire, Priests are metal braziers that house the fire. They protect it, contain it, and ensure that it continues to burn without burning everything around it.

Sometimes a Priest is born with this strength. Other times she receives it later in life. It is both a talent and a skill. Without the talent, she will never commune with the gods and survive. But without education and practice, she will never be able to use it. Talent lets her hear the gods, but it cannot force them to speak to her. It lets her speak to them, but it cannot make them listen. Talent allows her to summon their power into the world. But it does not ensure that she can control it.

Above all else, being a Priest means being a negotiator. You cannot command the gods, but you can persuade them. Humans depend on the gods to sustain the world, but the gods also depend on humans to feed and nourish them with worship. Priests spend their lives making deals with the forces of the universe to try to achieve the best possible results for both humans and gods.

SUMMONING THE GODS

The majority of Priestly duties take place behind the scenes. The careful currying of divine favor, the logistics of large scale worship, the research and interpretation of omens, the duitiful daily prayers--ordinary people rarely witness these routine matters. The thing most admire about Priests is their ability to summon the gods.

There are many misconceptions across Semanawak about what it means to summon the gods. Just because everybody worships them does not mean that everybody understands them. Most people think that summoning a god means the skies will open and an anthropomorphic figure that looks just the codex pictures will float down and start speaking. The truth is not nearly so literal.

Gods can manifest in countless forms, depending on what aspects of the universe they govern. Sometimes these forms are obvious, but more often they are quite subtle. When a Priest summons Weystitalin to heal someone, there is rarely anything to see. The Priest calls up to the setting Sun and allows light to fall upon the wound, then bandages it up. It is not until the following morning, when the wound has healed without a trace, that the god's presence is revealed. Weystitalin did not show up as a person. She exists in the process of healing itself. The only time gods appear in human form is when Priests invite them

into their own bodies.

Not all summonings are subtle, of course. There are countless stories of Priests summoning tremendous blasts of fire from Oleleteletl, sculpting entire mountains with the power of Itztechiwani, collapsing fortresses with earthquakes from Sipaktli, and withering people to dust with a touch by inviting Nakoyomiketl into themselves. But the more powerful the summons, the less control the Priest retains over the effect. In many ways it is more appropriate to say that Priests unleash the gods, as opposed to summon them.

Priest call to gods through Sacred Bundles, idols, or from certain sacred locations where gods are known to dwell. These things are conduits from which divine power flows, and also channels that allow Priests to communicate with the gods. Without them, it is not possible to call upon the gods.

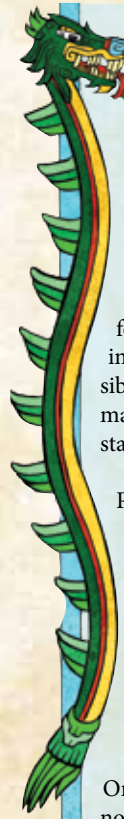
MISCONCEPTIONS

Priests spend their entire lives studying the gods. Consequently, they understand them differently than most ordinary people.

Most ordinary people imagine the gods as really powerful humans with magic powers that they can talk to and ask favors from. They pay them tribute just like they pay tribute to the nobles. They praise them, they bargain with them, and they call upon them for comfort and for vengeance. These personal relationships are important, and they help people understand the impossibly powerful forces that govern their lives. But there are many nuances that ordinary people simply do not understand.

Priests know that the gods are not human. They are gods. They are forces of nature incarnate. Their minds and motivations are vastly different, and understanding them requires a lifetime of research and contemplation. What are the desires of the wind? Why does it blow gently one day and fiercely the next? How does it regard humans, and what can humans do to appease it? These are the questions that Priests spend their whole lives asking.

Ordinary humans are not wrong. Most of them simply do not grasp the full complexity of the issue. This is perhaps the great challenge that Priests face: what do you tell ordinary, hardworking people when the universe is so terrifyingly powerful and chaotic?



PRIESTLY ORDERS

Any Priest can speak to or summon any god, so long as she has a spiritual connection through a Sacred Bundle, idol, or sacred location. But it is dangerous to call to an unfamiliar god, because gods are very temperamental. They are conscious forces of nature, like rivers or jaguars or mountains. If you under-



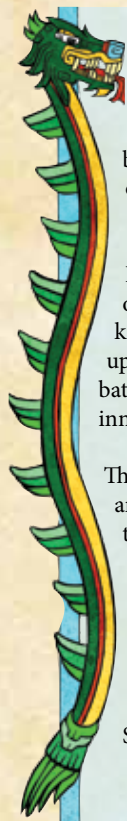
stand them, you can deal with them safely. But if you don't, you can easily get yourself and others killed. Remember: Priests are resistant to the power of gods, but they are not immune.

For this reason, Priests join Priestly Orders that specialize in dealing with small groups of gods. The Orders build temples, maintain the idols and Sacred Bundles, learn what offerings their gods prefer, which incantations please them, how to recognize when they are generous or vengeful, and so on. Priests respect and admire all gods. But they are especially dedicated to and knowledgeable about the gods of their Order.

SACRED PRECINCTS

Each Order lives communally in areas known as Sacred Precincts. Sacred Precincts are spiritual landscapes, divine frameworks inscribed upon the world and represented by the physical layout of buildings and structures. They are usually located in the middle of cities, and serve as the gateways to the divine for the city and the entire Altepetl.

Each Order manages its home Precinct like a noble might manage a kalpuli. The Priests design the buildings, negotiate with laborers to have them constructed, collect tribute from farms to feed themselves, and so on. Priestly Orders are as much political institutions as spiritual ones. They create and maintain a Sacred Precinct that pleases the gods and brings favor to the Altepetl. This is both the source of their power and their chief obligation.



PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL LAYOUT

The Sacred Precinct of Popokatetlan houses Itziwitl and Sipaktli, among others. Both of these gods are important to life in Popokatetlan, which is why they both have temples there. But the Priests know that they do not get along well in this location. They have opposing goals for this region.

If their temples are placed together, they cause all kinds of trouble--Sipaktli may create earthquakes to try to knock down Itziwitl's temple, while Itziwitl may open up magma vents to cover Sipaktli's courtyard in slag. The battle between them would spill out onto Earth and harm innocent human bystanders.

Therefore, in order to contain the conflict, their temples are located on opposite sides of the Precinct, Itziwitl to the West and Sipaktli to the East. Because the gods are placed in physical opposition, they are satisfied and do not feel the need to escalate the conflict spiritually with natural disasters. Spiritual opposition is represented through physical opposition.

These are the sorts of things that drive the layout of the Sacred Precincts.



FLOWER PRIESTS OF XOCHITLAN

The Flower Priests are the most prestigious of the Priestly Orders and one of the most powerful groups in all of Semanawak. Their Sacred Precinct is located in Xochitlan at the very foundation of heaven. They preside over the coronations of the Wey Tlatoani and Tonalsiawtl and look after the chosen land of the Tonalteka. Their founding members were the guides of the Tonalteka who returned to the Valley. Politics and religion are closely tied across Semanawak, but no group exemplifies this as well as the Flower Priests.





The Flower Priests believe that, in order for humans to serve the gods properly, they must have wise and powerful leaders to direct them in their worship. Farmers spend all day thinking of crops and soil and irrigation in order to provide food for their families and society. They do not have the time to understand the true nature of the gods, for that kind of understanding takes a lifetime of study to achieve. Therefore, learned individuals like the Flower Priests, who spend their whole lives studying the gods, must step in and guide the farmers. That way the farmer does not have to understand. He has only to obey.

The Flower Priests are famous for their lavish festivals and huge public rituals. No other Order can create a spectacle like the Flower Priests. They employ the best musicians, the bravest Warriors, the most skillful orators, and countless laborers to build the elaborate setpieces that make their rituals so distinctive. Most Flower Priests are nobles of Tonalteka descent, and so they are able to direct tremendous wealth and influence towards creating the greatest shows in Semanawak. They are highly entertaining as well as moving, and they attract huge crowds from all over the Empire.

Simpler Orders criticize these grand displays as excessive and unseemly. But Flower Priests know that the festivals are not about serving the gods. They are about serving the people. They are about transforming worship into something that normal humans will be passionate about.

The old High Flower Priestess Noxochikoztli once said "Ask a man to bleed, and he will refuse. Offer a man a chance to earn a wooden trophy by running over sharp rocks in front of a crowd, and he will shed twenty times more blood than you could ever need." This is the true secret of the Flower Priests: humans need the gods, the gods need sacrifices, and the best way to convince humans to offer sacrifices is to turn sacrifice into a game.

CREED OF THE FLOWER PRIESTS

The Eagle looks at the world stretched beneath him, so he can see how it all fits together. He can see an army approaching in the distance, and knows that, for a city to survive, it must abandon its buildings and fields and flee. But those who live on the Earth cannot see what he sees, and therefore they cannot understand why he would ask them to do something so difficult. Why does he demand such sacrifices of them? Why must they suffer so much from his decrees?

But the Eagle does not have time to explain himself. He does not have time to convince them. He must act fast to save other cities from the same fate. If he lands and answers all their questions, countless others will die because he failed to save them. Therefore, it is better that they simply obey.

So when the Eagle tells us Priests that an army is coming, we tell the people that the gods have promised us a better life somewhere else. We tell them grand stories and make impossible promises of the splendor that awaits. Only then will they leave their homes. Only then will they survive.

GODS OF THE FLOWER PRIESTS IN THE SACRED PRECINCT OF XOCHITLAN

Center	Weysitlalin (Great Star)
East	Teoxotlani (Lighter of the Sacred Flame)
West	Chokanantzin (Weeping Mother)
North	Tlewachtli (Fire Seed)
South	Kwekweponiwitl (Blooming Feather)



CORN PRIESTS OF MIXIWILIZTLAN

The Corn Priests have the crucial task of protecting the breadbasket of the Empire from spiritual harm and disfavor. They are also responsible for tracking the seasons and decreeing when farmers should plant or harvest their crops. This is a heavy burden to bear, for while all Priests are responsible for protecting their people spiritually, the decisions of the Corn Priests literally determine whether or not the Empire starves. Maize is their religion, and there is nothing abstract about it--maize either grows, or it doesn't.

The Corn Priests are probably the least popular Order in Semanawak. It is extremely difficult to predict the highly variable seasons, and even the most skilled Corn Priests get it wrong some of the time. But it means that everybody has spent a year or more starving because a Corn Priest made a mistake. Corn



Priests also require more sacrifices than any other Order. This is necessary to maintain the fertility of the Earth and keep the rain falling. But it means that everybody knows someone who has died at the hands of a Corn Priest, and someone who has died trying to gain captives for Corn Priest sacrifices. The people of Semanawak understand hardship and sacrifice, and know that the gods require them. But the Corn Priests are almost always the ones who ask for these things, and so it is hard not to resent them.

In response to this the Corn Priests have become a very stern, serious, and unforgiving Order. They do not tolerate outsiders who question their decrees, and they are quick to punish doubters and agitators. They work hard to maintain their authority and do not hesitate to use the power of their gods to ensure compliance. They certainly do not enjoy this, but there is simply no alternative. Countless lives depend on people obeying them. Whether they do so out of love or fear does not matter.

A great deal of Corn Priest knowledge and tradition comes from the Alka'balum of the Jungle. The farming methods they favor, the fertility rituals, many of their songs and chants, and even their traditional hairstyle and clothing were all inspired by or adapted from the Alka'balum during the Time of Wandering. They happily accept Alka'balum into their ranks (which almost never happens in other Orders) and work hard to build strong ties to Alka'balum Priests in the Jungle, who they consider the wisest people in Semanawak. The only people who can question a Corn Priest and survive are Alka'balum.

The Corn Priests are by far the largest Order, exceeding any three other Orders combined. There are two reasons for this: firstly, they watch over the crops and serve the farmers of the Empire. There are more farmers than any other profession, so therefore, they *need* more Priests than any other Order. Secondly, they are the only Order that not only permits but *requires* their members to have children, and the priestly talent often passes through blood. All other Orders require Priests to take oaths of chastity, but the Corn Priests know that the gods of fertility only respect those who demonstrate fertility themselves.

CREED OF THE CORN PRIESTS

We pledge ourselves to the preservation of life. But what is life? Life is a river. No one drop remains in the river for more than a few days or weeks, but some rivers have flowed since the beginning of our world. Through their motion something long lasting and stable is created. Life is not an instant. It is a process.

Life is a fire. It creates warmth and light and pushes back the dark nothingness that exists in its absence. Every torch will eventually burn down to nothing, but so long as the fire is passed it will burn forever. We honor both the burning and the passing, for only through them can we keep back the darkness. Life is time. It is the passing of moments, the continuous change from instant to instant, and the recognition of these

things. Without life, there is only the eternal instant, the simultaneous beginning and end. Only life can count the days.

We dedicate ourselves to the passing of moments, to the changing of seasons, to the flowing of rivers, and to the burning of fires.

GODS OF THE CORN PRIESTS IN THE SACRED PRECINCT OF MIXIWILIZTLAN

Center	Elopatiliztli (Healer of Maize)
East	Teosinte (Sacred Maize)
West	Sipaktli (Earth Caiman)
North	Wakikoatl (Dry Serpent)
South	Akoatl (Water Serpent)



SINGING PRIESTS OF ILWIKAKALKO

The Singing Priests call the remote mountain Precinct of Ilwikakalko their home. They are one of the smallest Orders, and also one of the few to live outside of a major city. While there are some who would consider Ilwikakalko a city, it is really more of a gathering place. It is the spiritual heart of the Altepetl, not its population center.





Despite their small numbers, however, the Singing Priests are one of the most influential Orders in the Valley. They are the Greeters of the Day and Wind, the first people in the Valley to see the dawn and feel the wind as it arrives from the east. Each morning they praise the Sun with songs and music, while each gust of wind that enters the Valley hears their words and listens to their advice about where to go (and where to carry any rain clouds it bears). They have the ear of the universe, and thus few are willing to trifle with them.

Despite this power, however, the Singing Priests are not an aggressive Order. They use it to defend themselves and their Atēpetl from attackers, but otherwise they are content to court the wind and share songs with it in peace.

To many visitors, the Singing Priests seem more like a musical troupe than a Priestly Order. They spend long stretches of the day practicing their singing, drumming, and storytelling, seemingly oblivious to any of the larger issues in the world. Many other Orders find them extremely irritating, for they do not share the somber attitudes of their peers. Singing Priests laugh, smile, sing, and dance with carefree abandon. Their rituals are difficult to distinguish from parties.

The Singing Priests understand what others do not: the wind is not serious. It is not somber. It sings and it dances. It has many stories to tell. And as servants of the wind, the Singing Priests are bound to honor its wishes, not those of the misguided fools from lands below.

CREED OF THE SINGING PRIESTS

Do you ever wonder why humans live on the ground? There are many creatures who fly, like eagles, hawks, and even vultures. We see this every day, but few ever wonder why humans do not also soar through the skies and dance among the clouds. The reason for this is because humans Worry.

The people of Semanawak are consumed by worry. They lie awake wondering if the Sun will rise, if the rains will fall, if an enemy will come to kill them. These concerns are like rocks in their stomachs that keep them weighed down and stuck to the ground.

But we are the ones who live high in the sky, free from these worries. We are honored to live in the joyous presence of the wind. We are privileged to wake up each morning to the light of the newborn sun rising fresh from beneath the ocean. Their songs and stories break apart the rocks in our bellies and leave us light and free. We could fly off into the sky if we wanted, never to return and never to feel the stifling cares of the lost and earthbound worriers!

But this is not what we will do. Fortune has favored us, and we cannot simply take its bounty and flee with it. After all, good fortune can be its own weight, and if we do not share it it will imprison us just as surely as worry. Therefore, we will share the songs we have learned. We will share the stories. We will give those who

worry a moment of respite from their cares and concerns. We may not be able to lift their bodies into the sky. But we can make their spirits soar for a short while.

GODS OF THE SINGING PRIESTS IN THE SACRED PRECINCT OF ILWIKAKALKO

Center	Ehekamitotiani (Wind Dancer)
East	Weysitlalin (Great Star)
West	Sesekmikwiztli (Death Chill)
North	Tlatekwintewetl (Thunder Drum)
South	Elopatiliztli (Healer of Maize)

SMOKING PRIESTS OF POPOKATETLAN

The Smoking Priests spend their lives at the base of the great Volcano Teminitēpetl, battlefield of the Earth. They are responsible for keeping peace between the warring gods of Earth. Of all the elements, Earth is perhaps the most contradictory. It is creative and destructive, generous and greedy, nourishing and poisoning. Small wonder that its gods have such trouble getting along.

Most know the Smoking Priests as the ones who keep Teminitēpetl from erupting, and this is indeed one of their most important duties. They work hard to keep the volcano god Itziwitl calm and satisfied, lest he release the Fire People imprisoned below and drown the Valley in molten rock. It is a difficult and stressful task that requires great endurance and steady nerves--after all, even the appeased volcano never stops smoking, never stops threatening. Those who cannot remain calm soon go mad from the pressure.

In addition to calming the volcano, however, the Smoking Priests have countless other duties. They look after the resources of the Earth, ensuring that quarry workers do not plunder too much and that artisans do not waste precious materials. They preserve and promote craftsmanship in all its forms, both the knowledge and the physical examples of it. They are also generous patrons of the crafted arts. Many of the most beautiful items or buildings would not be but for the Smoking Priests dedication to creation.

Though they seek to maintain the balance between society and the Earth, the Smoking Priests frequently find themselves in conflict with both. The Crafter-Nobles of Popokatetlan draw their power from their monopolistic control of craft knowledge, while the Smoking Priests seek to discover and spread these secrets so that all may benefit. Quarry workers and crafters must harvest and work with stone to survive, and are always seeking more in order to make more money. Smoking Priests aggressively enforce quarry limits and punish those who misuse materials.

Meanwhile, the gods constantly send threatening signs that humans are taking too much. The Earth trembles, avalanches destroy everything in their path, sinkholes swallow people and



communities, and poisonous geysers kill entire villages in the night. The limits the Smoking Priests impose may seem crippling to humans. But to the gods, they are barely adequate. Peace is in short supply in Popokatetlan. The gods bicker, the people scheme against each other, and neither wants to abide by or accommodate the needs of the other. But through all of this, the Smoking Priests have prevailed, balancing stability on the razor's edge.

CREED OF THE SMOKING PRIESTS

Humans are amazing creatures. They build wonders, they appreciate beauty, and they can bear great hardship when inspired. They are crucial to the survival of the universe, and embody all that is hopeful and good. But they are also a hole in the bottom of the world. Everything runs out through them. They are a belly that cannot be filled.

With humans, there is never enough. Today's abundance is tomorrow's poverty. There are no limits that humans can respect for long without constant vigilance.

Therefore, we must be that vigilance. We hear the groans and growls of the Earth. We see its wounds. We must do all that we can to make our people respect the limits that they cannot see.

But this world is a hard and unfair one. Disaster falls from the sky and rises up from the ground. Danger looms over us all, and it is difficult to know whether or not we are prepared. Abundant food for a day is but a meager morsel when stretched out over a week or a month. The reason people seek so much is because they have run out before. And all humans would rather steal than starve.

Therefore, we must also convince the Earth to relent. We hear the cries of hungry children. We see them starve. We must negotiate and forge bargains that allow our people to take what they need from a jealous and unforgiving world.

Our task is one that will never end. It began before we were born, and it will continue long after we die. Civilization will always balance on a razor, and we are the ones who go from side to side to keep it from ever sliding off.

GODS OF THE SMOKING PRIESTS IN THE SACRED PRECINCT OF POPOKATETLAN	
Center	Itztechiwani (Obsidian User)
East	Sipaktli (Earth Caiman)
West	Itziwitl (Obsidian Feather)
North	Ometochtli (2 Rabbit)
South	Nakoyomiketl (God of Death)

FIRE PRIESTS OF TZATZIKO

The Fire Priests are the only Priestly Order of the Empire to reside outside of the Valley. Their history comes not from the Tonalteka, but from the Tzatzini, from the nomadic raider



peoples of the Desert. Consequently, they are the exception to nearly every rule governing Priests. The people of the Valley generally consider them to be barbarous folk shamans rather than true Priests, but they are the only Order known that has managed to earn the favor of Oleletetl, the god of fire and war.

One of the things that makes the Fire Priests unique is that they do not build temples to house their gods. Instead, they carry their Idols and Sacred Bundles constantly in tribute to the nomadic lifestyle of their ancestors and fellow Desert dwellers. Just as fire cannot burn for long in the same place without exhausting its fuel, so too must the Fire Priests constantly move to satisfy the eternal hunger of their gods. Each god is attended by a procession of idol bearers who wander about Tzatziko and the surrounding countryside. Every so often they let out blood curdling screams, both to honor the gods and also to let others know where they are.

Another jarring difference between the Fire Priests and the other Orders is that only men are allowed to join the Fire





Priests. Women make up the majority of the other Orders, and most consider spiritual matters to be well within the feminine domain. But while there are stories of women who tried to join, there has never been a female Fire Priest in all of history. The Order maintains a tradition of strict exclusion and claims that only men can bear the might of Oleletletl the war god. Nobody knows whether or not this is true--no woman as ever been a Fire Priest, and no other Order has ever managed to gain the favor of one of Oleletletl's Idols. But many men and women have perished in terrible flames trying.

Regardless, the dismissive attitude of the Fire Priests causes great conflict with the other Orders. Yoliwani, the High Corn Priestess of Mixiwiliztlan, once remarked to a visiting Fire Priest: "You rule over a wilted patch of desert. Nothing grows there. Very little lives there aside from bandits and beggars. And without our help you surely would have died out long ago. The favor you claim to wield looks suspiciously like wrath! For all your pride and boasting, you Fire Priests have failed to bring much prosperity to your land. What exactly are you so proud of?"

The Fire Priest's reply: "Whether from favor or wrath, I am proud that Tzatziko continues to burn."

The Fire Priests are outsiders to the Empire, and go to great lengths to alienate themselves. But the power they wield cannot be denied. They are influential despite themselves. It remains to be seen whether they will eventually earn a greater place in the Empire, or whether their grating ways will eventually push them out entirely.

CREED OF THE FIRE PRIESTS

We live with the flame of the war god within us. He is our eternal light. We walk with Oleletletl, and therefore we leave burning footprints across the world and across history.

Oleletletl burns all who oppose us. At our touch, they turn to scorched ash. At our shouts, they wither like flowers before a volcano. We hear no doubt. We feel no fear. All we hear is the crackling of fire. All we feel is its searing heat. We pity those who stand before us, who stand beside us, who are left behind us. Flesh cannot help but burn when fire comes near.

We live with the flame of the war god within us. He is our eternal pain. We walk with Oleletletl, and therefore we leave burning footprints leading out into the Desert, away from flesh and wood.

GODS OF THE FIRE PRIESTS

IN THE SACRED PRECINCT OF TZATZIKO

Center	Oleletletl (God of War)
East	Wakikoatl (Dry Serpent)
West	Tlewachtli (Fire Seed)
North	Teoyatinemini (God Who Travels With You)
South	Ometochtli (2 Rabbit)



DRUNKEN PRIESTS OF TLATLAHAKO

There are few in Semanawak who would not smile and profess a desire to join the Drunken Priests of Tlatlahako. Most imagine them as a rowdy bunch of revelers who are not just allowed but *required* to get wildly trashed in the name of the gods. But those who have actually been to Tlatlahako come away with a very different view.

The Drunken Priests treat drinking as a source of knowledge, a way to contact the gods and seek enlightenment. Their 'parties' are usually rather unnerving. Between the eerie chanting, bizarre rituals, alcohol-fueled confessions of secrets and shame, aggressive self-mutilation, and the ominous visions and portents that the Priests reveal, visitors are more likely to come away injured and frightened than drunk and happy.

The Drunken Priests are dedicated to the idea of paired opposites. They hold contradictions within themselves like a smok-





er holding a drag from a pipe. They treasure that which bring together contradictory things--water that burns, laughter that brings tears, lies that reveal truth, and so on. Contradictions are where true wisdom hides, and above all else the Drunken Priests seek wisdom.

Wisdom comes in many forms, however, and the Drunken Priests value them all. They value the insightful madman just as much as the duitiful scholar, for both seek the same thing in different ways. Some members maintain marvelous libraries while others spend their lives on the street corner babbling incoherently to passers-by. They have brilliant writers and complete illiterates among them. The other Orders joke that the Drunken Priests have both the finest stargazers and the finest navel gazers among them, and it is completely true.

The Drunken Priests are by far the most diverse Order in the Empire. They will accept anybody willing to seek knowledge and face the extremely dangerous initiation ceremony (which involves placing your face over a geyser that is about to erupt), regardless of what they believe or what tribe they come from. Alka'balum, Tzatzini, Tonalteka, and all varieties of Tlalteka people serve side by side within the Drunken Priests. Even the Kakayawani would be welcome, though so far none have ever tried to join. They do not always get along perfectly, but they are all united by shared loyalty to the gods and to the pursuit of knowledge.

Of all the Priestly Orders, the Drunken Priests are probably the weakest politically. Even in Tlatlahako they have very little power over the affairs of the altepetl. Most Orders command lands and oversee large portions of society. The Drunken Priests largely keep to themselves and slur "wise sayings" to all who come calling. Most Priestly Orders maintain their political power through force and dominance. A few maintain it by inspiring love from their people. But the people of Tlatlahako actively prop up their Drunken Priests and keep them alive despite themselves.

Though they command few, many come to the Drunken Priests in search of knowledge. They are the unchallenged lorekeepers and oracles of the Empire. They do not force their ideas on anybody, but those who come to them rarely leave without new ideas. And some of those ideas have radically altered the course of history. Despite their odd quirks, none in the Empire can match their collection of knowledge or ability to generate it out of thin air.

CREED OF THE DRUNKEN PRIESTS

True knowledge exists on the borders, and is found by crossing them. Consider water and steam. If you look at either alone, you will see a thirst quenching liquid and a burning vapor. One flows along the ground, and one floats through the air. But if you watch water when it is on the verge of becoming steam, you will see its true nature: they are one and the same thing. Steam is simply air that was once water and will become water again. Rivers are destined to rise as air and flow up into the sky,

only to become rivers once again.

True knowledge reveals itself through exceptions. Normality only exists when something deviates from it. Deviance only exists when there is a normality to break from. Death is a solemn and serious thing, but until you know what is funny about it you will not truly understand it. A joke is a wonderful, blessed thing, but until you see just how sad it is that humans laugh at the absurdities of someone who will soon be gone forever, you will not truly understand it.

True knowledge always contradicts itself. Everything right is a lie. Everything worth believing can be proven wrong. It is worth believing that men and women are equal. But if you treat them the same, you will be treating them unequally.

We are the Drunken Priests. We are the ones who are both drowning and burning, the ones who drink and become thirsty. You cannot understand a cloudy world with a clear mind. We are the ones who see clearest while in the mist.

GODS OF THE DRUNKEN PRIESTS IN THE SACRED PRECINCT OF TLATLAHAKO

Center	Ometochtli (2 Rabbit)
East	Ximekatl (Counter of Days)
West	Tlakwepa (Vomit Eater)
North	Tlayomixtli (Night Cloud)
South	Sipaktli (Earth Caiman)



MOON PRIESTS OF TEQYEZTEKO

The Moon Priests carry the ancient traumas of the Valley. They are the embodiment of its attitudes towards the Kakayawani, the scar the Kakayawani left upon the Valley. But they also represent the undeniable kinship the Empire shares with its great enemy. The Moon Priests worship Kakayawani gods according to Kakayawani traditions. They dance Kakayawani dances, chant in the Kakayawani language, and make offerings to their gods the way the Kakayawani did. By doing so, they inspire everything that the Kakayawani inspire: fear, hatred, and respect.

Without the Moon Priests, the Kakayawani gods would rampage unchecked through the Empire. They would heed the call of Kakayawani Priests alone, who seek the destruction of the Empire, and crazed cultists, who offer their weak willed bodies without any understanding of the beings they deal with. Entire families would vanish in the night, armies would succumb to dreadful catastrophes, and the people would lie awake in eternal terror.

The Moon Priests cannot stop the Kakayawani gods. But they can redirect them. They can contain them. They can shape their mayhem and send it back against the enemy, or at least towards less destructive victims. An unchecked Kakayawani god might kill a Tlatoani and push an entire altepetl into an-





archy and chaos. But if the Moon Priests can help that god kill a lesser Pilin or a Masewal instead, they can satisfy its desire for mayhem while sparing society from such upheaval. It is still tragic, and the families of whatever victim they choose will hate them for it. But the destruction will be restricted to individuals and families, rather than affecting entire nations.

The Moon Priests walk a dangerously narrow path through the world. They are responsible for serving their gods and also protecting the people from their mischief, but if they stray too far to either side, the other will destroy them. They must perpetrate mayhem in the name of the gods, but if their atrocities are too heinous, the people will turn on them and beat them to death with clubs. The life of a Moon Priest is all about maintaining this balance between fear and hate.

The Moon Priests are very selective of their members, for they must withstand a lifetime of trickery, deception, and temptation. Only the strong-willed and clever can hope to succeed. But nevertheless, they deal constantly with the wildest, most corrupting gods known. Sometimes the gods trick them. And sometimes the gods find weakness in even these strong souls, and exploit it. Moon Priests have been turned before, won over by greed or fear or sheer madness and transformed into agents of pure destruction. It does not happen often, but history quakes from each catastrophic instance. The change is not obvious, and some may wreak havoc for years before being discovered--after all, Moon Priests are required to harm society for its own good. It is disturbingly difficult to tell the good ones from the insane ones.

CREED OF THE MOON PRIESTS

We are the ones who wear the form of our enemy. We sing his songs. We don his masks. We clothe ourselves in his flesh. There are three reasons why we do this: to mock, to steal, and to remember.

We mock our enemy with his own body, with his own clothes, with his own words. We do this not to harm him, but to help ourselves. Our people see us in the form of the enemy and it fills them with rage. They see us act as the enemy acts, and it makes them wild. They yearn to fight us, and so they yearn to fight him. They see in us all the things worth battling against, and so when they meet their true enemy, they can recognize him for what he is.



We steal that which makes our enemy strong. We steal his beliefs, his rituals, and his gods. We steal his parents, his siblings, and his entire family. And then we turn these things against him. The enemy believes the gods reward their chosen ones by destroying their opponents, so we wreak destruction upon him to show him his gods favor us. The enemy believes the gods punish those they scorn by sowing discord among them, so we disguise ourselves as him and fail to spread discord among ourselves to show him his gods do not scorn us. We will devour whatever gives him sustenance. We will crush whatever gives him hope.

We remember what our enemy did to us long ago. He tortured us and smothered us and tried to make us his slaves. He earned our eternal hatred with his acts. But he also shaped us into what we are. He gave us a reason to make weapons, to build walls, to become great Warriors. He gave us a reason to learn lore, to seek allies, to earn the favor of the gods. He gave us a reason to become mighty, and way to prove our might. We mourn those who are not here because of him. But we celebrate those who became great because of him.

His blood still flows through our Empire. It makes us sick sometimes. But it also

makes us strong.

We are the ones who wear the form of our enemy. We sing his songs. We don his masks. We clothe ourselves in his flesh. But we must always remember to hate him, lest we become him on the inside as well as the outside.

GODS OF THE MOON PRIESTS IN THE SACRED PRECINCT OF TEDYEZTEKO

Center	Xolokwani (Bald One)
East	Ayotini (Last Breath)
West	Chokanantzin (Weeping Mother)
North	Sesekmikwiztli (Death Chill)
South	Wakikoatl (Dry Serpent)



THE FIVE SUNS LEGEND, PART 4

As told by Teoxiwtl (Precious Turquoise), Singing Priestess of Ilwikakalko.

THE THIRD SUN

The gods once again gathered at Tleteoxiwakan, the place where the Third Sun was born, and looked up at Elopataliztli, floating high in the sky where Itztechiwani had once been. Her voice spread across the land like a rain storm, filling the world the way the rain fills the rivers and streams:

"This world needs a new Sun! I am the deepest and most tireless of us all. It was I who pruned the land and worked it into an inhabitable world. It was I who washed away Itztechiwani's pollution. I shall be the new Sun. You may watch as I make this world right!"

And so the gods at Tleteoxiwakan gathered in a circle and gazed up at Elopataliztli, floating in the sky, and in an instant she began to glow with a cool, soothing blue light, bathing the mountainous landscape in illumination once again.

Elopataliztli fixed her eyes upon Tleteoxiwakan and the countless peaks spread across the world, and from her eyes fell a deluge of god-tears. They fell upon the mountain peaks and began to flow down the mountains, and as they did the droplets formed into a race of people. Each was clear and pure and pristine as it was born from the sky, but as they traveled down the mountain slopes they began to pick up the soil, the color, and character of the land. From Elopataliztli the Blue Sun, the Water People were born.

PEOPLE OF WATER

Elopataliztli taught her Water People many things. She taught them boundless endurance, allowing them to flow forever from the highest peaks to the lowest valleys, vigor to outlast the land itself and therefore shape it. The tireless rivers of Water People carved through the mountains of the world, forming paths and canyons and dulling the sharp peaks. At first the Water People got lost on their way down from the mountain peaks, but Elopataliztli also taught them how to flow and curve with the land, finding the path by feel rather than planning. She taught them these things, and then told them to use these virtues to find meaning and nourish the gods.

And so the Water People used what they had learned, and lived and lived and lived. They lived without tiring and without dying. They shaped the land as they lived, carrying with them the soil and memories of where they had been. They used the pieces of the world they came across, and when they met others they shared what they carried. But as they flowed ever downward they aged from pristine River People to muddy Bog People, old and slow. Some of them flowed into corners and became stagnant pools, full of history and memories but unable to move. Some of them flowed into the sea, raising the level of the waters and slowly beginning to submerge the world. Yet such was their longevity that the Water People never died, never rose to become clouds, never rained down again. Water

People flowed down but never rose, and gradually the tears of Elopataliztli dwindled.

A SEQUENCE ENDS, A CYCLE BEGINS

The other gods watched the world sink into the sea as the Water People drowned it, and were sad. Weysitlalin murmured something softly, but no one else heard her, so they assumed she was also sad. Ehekamitotiani, angry that the world should be washed away, returned to Tleteoxiwakan and from there leapt up into the sky. However, as he approached her Elopataliztli's light faded and she sank lower in the sky, descending to meet Ehekamitotiani. She looked down at her world and spoke:

"I have no more tears to shed for this world, great Ehekamitotiani. I am drained. Though my people may live forever, they will never climb back up the mountainsides. They will never be young again. They will flow ever downward into the ocean and fill it until it closes over even the tallest mountains. Until old water dies, the ocean cannot be emptied. Until old water dies, there can be no new rain. Life is sweet, but without death, life cannot be renewed. Will you bring death to the world, Ehekamitotiani? Will you make it live again?"

Ehekamitotiani nodded respectfully, and allowed Elopataliztli to step down from the sky. She landed far to the south and planted a vast garden there, a garden beautiful beyond beauty, which she watered with the very last of her tears. That is why the southern lands are so lush and full of water and life.

THE GREAT WIND

Ehekamitotiani then drew in a deep breath and gave a scream like ten thousand eagles. The scream blew across the world with the force of ten thousand hurricanes, and as the wind wailed the Water People were torn apart and carried up out of the ocean and into the sky. Their shredded bodies became the clouds, and as Ehekamitotiani carried them across the world they bled, and their blood came down as pure and pristine rain, free of soil and memories. The rain fell onto the mountaintops and flowed down as rivers, but when the rivers stopped or entered into the sea they would die with the wind and rise again as clouds, only to rain down again upon the world. The cycle of life and death was born, and that is why today the world is vigorous and strong, why crops grow and perish, why people live and die, and why empires begin, become famous and powerful, and then fall.

VULTURES LAND

As the Water People died, Xolokwani slunk across the world and snuck up behind some of the Water People and knocked them out with a blow to the head. He dragged the liquid bodies and threw them down a deep hole that only he knew of. This hole led to a secret corner beneath the earth, down in the Underworld, and after stealing the Water People Xolokwani returned to Tleteoxiwakan and pretended he was never gone. Weysitlalin saw what he had done and murmured something softly, but no one else heard her, not even Xolokwani, so they assumed that everything was fine.



MEDICINE

The art of medicine is revered in Semanawak. No matter who you are or where you come from, the ability to heal is treasured by all. But healing is just one half of medicine. The ability to harm is just as important, and just as respected.

A CALLING, NOT JUST A SKILL

Those who practice medicine are undeniably skilled. They must learn a variety of techniques--stitching, draining, bone setting, various dental techniques, and so forth--they must master a vast array of medicinal plants, and they must memorize accumulated lore in order to properly diagnose and treat their patients. But these things alone will not make one a healer. They are merely aids to those who have the gift.

Medicine is a calling, a blessing from the gods and the spirits. It is a faculty that some people have while others don't. The more you know, the better a healer you can become. But you cannot become a healer simply by learning things.

The thing that marks a true healer is Intuition. Every situation and every person is unique, and therefore you cannot blindly follow the methods established by others. The same symptoms may occur for many different reasons, and must be treated differently depending on the nature of the problem and the patient. You must rely on your intuition and instincts.

Being a healer is a lot like being a judge. There is a long history of tradition and precedent that you must interpret for each case. You can study the judgements and theories of the past and you can consult with colleagues to understand how they come to their decisions and per-

haps improve your own methods. But ultimately the thing that makes you a good judge is your innate sense of fairness and justice. A healer's intuition is the same thing. If you have it, you will be successful in solving the problems others bring before you. If you do not, then your judgements will ring false, and others will suffer.

THE THREE SOULS OF A HUMAN

The people of Semanawak do not have just one soul. Instead, they have three: Teyolia (Heart), Ihiyotl (Breath), and Tonalli (Light). These three spiritual essences animate the body and give it life. Each inhabits a different part of your body and governs a different aspect of your being. But all serve to nourish you and make you who you are.

This does *not* mean that these parts always work together, however. Each Soul has its own ambitions, its own voice. When you are healthy, these voices speak in unison, and there is harmony. But sometimes there is conflict between them. Sometimes they are out of balance. This is why you can think, say, and feel many things at the same time. You have a single body, but you are many voices, many minds.

Understanding these souls and the way they interact is a central part of medicine in Semanawak.



TEYOLIA

Teyolia is the Soul of Heart, the divine fire that animates you. It is the source of your strength, warmth, and vitality. Physical ability--might, vigor, and agility--is the domain of the Teyolia, as well as temper and passion.

Teyolia is revealed by the heat that a living body generates. When you exercise vigorously you become warm--that is your Teyolia manifesting more strongly. When you die, your heart stops beating and the heat gradually fades from your body--this is your Teyolia departing for the worlds beyond.



"Think of a human as a tree. A tree is a single whole, but it lives as three distinct parts: roots, trunk, and leaves. Each part is vital to the survival of the tree, connected to the others but serving a very different purpose. Separate them, and all you have is dead wood and litter. Put them together, and you have a powerful living being that spans the three levels of the universe."

--Momoztli (Altar), Midwife of Tlatlahako

IHIYOTL

Ihiyotl is the Soul of Breath, the divine wind that carries your words and ideas and allows you to influence the world without touching it. Social interaction and influence are the domain of your Ihiyotl, as well as attraction and enchantment.

Ihiyotl is revealed by the breath you draw and release and by the gusts of wind you generate with your movements. When you speak or catch someone's eye, you are sending your Ihiyotl out to influence them. When you die, the last breath you release is your Ihiyotl leaving your body to travel the world with the wind, maintaining your influence and the wisdom of your words long after your death.

TONALLI

Tonalli is the Soul of Light and Dark. It is the divine radiance that shines forth from you, and also the darkness and shadow you cast across the world. Thoughts, spirituality, and destiny are the domains of your Tonalli, as well as illumination and inspiration. It is the drop of divinity that resides within all humans.

Tonalli resides in your head and your hair. It is revealed by the shining halo of light that reflects off of your skin and hair when you stand in the light of the Sun or a fire, by the shadow you cast, and by your reflection. It is also the light that shines in your eyes as you live and fight and work. When you die, the light leaves your eyes--that is your Tonalli departing from your body in order to rejoin the Sun and become one with it again. Small portions of your Tonalli may remain in your body, giving it a sacred power even after death.

SOUL LOSS

The three Souls together imbue a person with extraordinary power, with the faculties that make human beings unique and allow them to achieve the impossible. But they are not invulnerable. Sometimes injuries, shocks, and traumas damage more than just your body. Sometimes they damage or even drive away one of your Souls.

This is the source of sickness and disease in Semanawak, and also of much bad luck. A loss, injury, or imbalance between one or more of the Souls will cause a variety of symptoms and troubles for the afflicted. These symptoms are different for each case, and occur in varying levels of severity.

A problem with the Ihiyotl might cause a minor cough, bad breath, the loss of one's voice, strangely hostile reactions from those one meets, severe pneumonia, or the like. Teyolia troubles could result in hot and cold flashes, muscle weakness, fits of rage, uncontrollable nosebleeds, and so on. Tonali afflictions could result in paleness or flushing, blindness, painful sensitivity to light, prolonged bad luck, and more.

TREATMENT AND HEALTH

Healing medicine has two major goals: treatment and health. Treatment is used against acute afflictions--injuries, obvious illness, sudden behavioral problems, and the like. In most cases such problems occur because something is present that is interfering with normal health. Treatment attempts to remove such impediments to health so that natural healing can occur and the person can return to normal. It is response medicine, and it focuses on eliminating or at least diminishing weakness.

Medicine is also used to promote general health. This is why people take frequent steambaths and why they keep their houses and streets clean. Such things increase health and enhance that which is already strong. This improves the quality of life and also guards against future problems. Treatment is sometimes necessary, but it is always better to prevent the problem in the first place by maintaining good health.

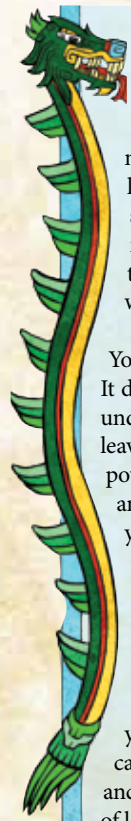
Extraordinary times require extraordinary methods. People who expect to face a great challenge often seek healers in order to fortify themselves with special medicine. Warriors going to war take amulets and special war paint to enhance their abilities. Pregnant women drink herbal teas and apply special balms in preparation for labor. Farmers use sacred plants to connect them to the spirits who inhabit their land in order to live more harmoniously with them.

THE HOMEMAKING CEREMONY

The Homemaking ceremony is a medicinal technique performed by people who have recently moved to a new place. Moving is difficult and traumatic, especially when you move a long distance. You leave the land where your ancestors lived and enter into a new and foreign place filled with new ancestors and new spirits. This ceremony allows you to connect with these local beings. It is a spiritual introduction, and a way of mystically transplanting yourself into new soil.

You begin by approaching hearthfire of your new house. It doesn't matter whether you own the house or are living under someone else's roof. You drop a bundle of sacred leaves into the fire--tobacco wrapped around a mix of other powerful plants--and deeply inhale the smoke. Neighbors and housemates may join, if they wish. The plants allow you to see and hear the spirits living in the area, and also allow the spirits to see you. You may speak with them, dance with them, fight with them, and do whatever you have to in order to come to an understanding.

It is rarely a pleasant experience, for few spirits trust new humans easily. They will test you to find out how you react and who you truly are. The plants also mystically sever many of your connections to the spirits and ancestors of your old homeland. You may hear the screams of loved ones long gone calling you back or cursing you for abandoning them. But after the visions fade, you will be attuned to your new home.





MEDICAL TECHNIQUES

The first step in any treatment is diagnosis. The healer examines and converses with the patient, administers a few tests (basic ones like pulse taking listening to the patient breathe as well as more advanced methods, such as blood-reading), and often uses sacred plants to speak with the spirits. She must be thorough, because every problem is unique. The same problem may stem from many different causes, and the same cause may require many different treatments to remedy in different cases. It is also important to know whether the affliction is natural or the result of harmful medicine.

Once the healer knows what is wrong, there are two components to the treatment: a physical component, and a spiritual component. Nothing is ever entirely one or the other, and neither is more important than the other. A wound has an obvious physical aspect--the gaping hole in one's flesh. The healer treats this through appropriate physical means, such as wrapping or stitching it up. But this alone will not restore health to the patient. The wound may turn red, ooze pus, cause a raging fever, and possibly rot right off. This is caused by a spiritual problem, and must be solved through appropriate spiritual means.

Physical techniques are very practical. Semanawak healers skillfully stitch wounds, drain abscesses, pull teeth, drill out dental cavities, relieve intra-cranial pressure, and perform various other surgical tasks. This requires a steady hand, good anatomical knowledge, and a great deal of practice. Those fortunate enough to have a teacher may observe

EXAMPLES OF HEALING TECHNIQUES

- A traveling merchant has a persistent, hacking cough--clearly the sign of a distressed *ihiyotl*. The healer and the merchant go into a steam bath to breathe some steam. The heat makes them feverish and shows them many visions, one of which reveals the presence of an angry trees spirit. The healer speaks with the spirit and learns that the merchant recently killed a tree trying to get some extra sap to sell. The spirit is now taking life energy from the merchant's *ihiyotl* in compensation. She tells the merchant that he must plant a new tree for the spirit to inhabit, and visit that tree every month to pay his respects. So long as he does this, the spirit will leave him alone.

- A child is plagued by violent, convulsive fits. The healer takes *teonanakatl* mushrooms and spends the night dancing and singing in circles around the child. In the morning, the healer reports that, when the child was born, a spirit took up residence in her body and has been living there ever since. The fits are caused by the child's maturing souls struggling against it. The healer advises against trying to expel the spirit, for it is as much a part of the child as anything else. Instead, the child must learn to live with the fits and make peace with the spirit. If she can recognize when they are coming, she can prepare for them and recover quickly afterwards. The healer offers to take *teonanakatl* with the child and introduce her to the spirit within her.

these procedures and practice under the watch of experienced eyes. Others develop their skills through grisly trial and error.

Spiritual techniques are more dramatic and usually involve facing the beings responsible for the problem, most often during dreams or sacred trances. Such beings are usually either angry or in need of something, and in order to solve the problem one must either appease them or drive them away. The healer may face these beings herself, or she may use sacred plants to allow the afflicted to face them. Sometimes they face them together, or even allow others to join in. It all depends on the situation, and which approach the healer feels will be most successful.

EXAMPLES OF SPIRITUAL METHODS

Sometimes spirits are pacified through conversation or a test of will. Other times it requires other methods--offerings (an ancestor spirit may demand an old enemy's blood as tribute), long journeys (a broken bone may only heal if bathed in the sacred water of the Serpent Field), or various strange actions (destroying a particular ant hill, dancing under a stormy sky, spending a night up in a tree, and so on). But regardless of how strange they seem, these methods are never as simple as they appear to be.

There is a famous story about a father with a disobedient son who seeks out a healer to cure his son's bad behavior. The healer looks the two over and then directs them to go out into the forest together to hunt down and kill a monkey with a red tail. She tells them that this monkey spirit is causing the son's misbehavior, and once it is gone the son will fall into line. But unknown to the father and son, there *aren't* any red-tailed monkeys in this part of the forest.

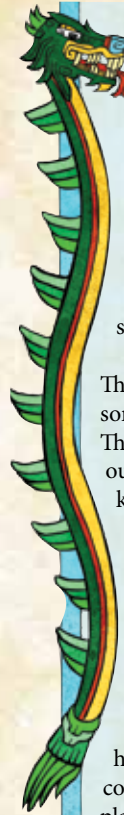
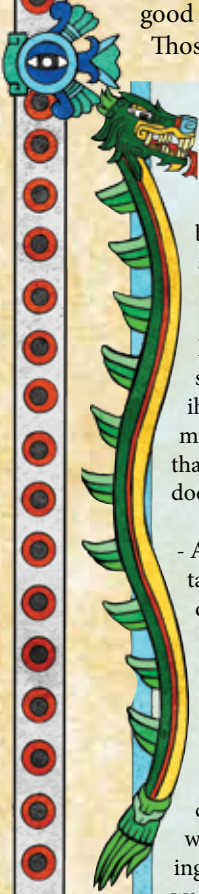
The son and father spend all day searching in vain for such a monkey, and return empty handed. But during that day they end up talking out the problem they were having. They reach a mutual understanding and thereby correct the imbalance that led to the problem in the first place.

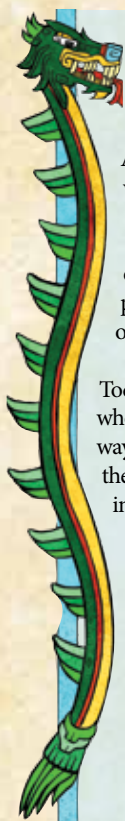
When the two return to the healer and tell her that the hunt failed, she smiles slightly and tells them that the absence of the monkey is a sign that the troublesome spirit has been driven from the area and won't bother them further. The two leave together cheerfully, convinced that they accomplished a great deed together. And in truth they did--it just wasn't the deed they think!

SACRED PLANTS

Some of the most important tools for healing are plants blessed with the ability to expand one's mind. There are many such plants in the world--peyote, *teonanakatl* mushrooms, *ololiwakwi* seeds, and many others--and each one has its own unique properties. But they are all used for two major purposes: to face your problems, and to gain knowledge.

Nobody knows for sure where the power of these plants comes





"Each plant is different, but they all come from seeds. Whether it is a pine tree, a palmetto, or maize, all plants come from seeds.

All creatures come from plants. Whether a deer, a wolf, a vulture, or the Earth Caiman herself, all creatures must either eat plants or eat other creatures who must eat plants. Even the soil is simply the crumbling, rotten remains of old plants or old creatures who trace their origins back to plants. Therefore, all life ultimately sprouts from the seeds of plants.

Today we see many creatures, many plants. But there are some who remember the old days. The elder plants remember the way back to the place where we are all seeds. They remember the time when we were all the same, before we each sprouted into something different.

Listen to their words, and you will know what life truly is."

--Soona (Moon), Tlamatini of the Nopalkwikan

from. Some say that taking them invites the plant spirits into yourself and allows you to see the world through a spirit's eyes. Others say that the plants change the balance of your souls and allow different souls to speak, and that the visions and voices are actually the release of suppressed truths from within you. But regardless of the reason, these plants are very important to medicine in Semanawak.

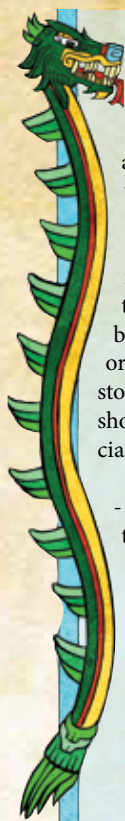
Each healer uses these plants in her own way, and each person who takes them walks a unique path, but there are some common beliefs. Many believe that these plants expand your senses and allow you to see, hear, and/or touch the spirits. Likewise, they allow the spirits to sense you. You are then able to work out whatever issues you have with these spirits or seek their advice on your problems.

Others believe that, in addition to bringing people in touch with the spirits, these plants also grant form and substance to



Sacred hallucinatory experiences are a big part of New Fire because they allow characters to work through internal issues in a dramatic, symbolic way that everyone can see and participate in. A character wrestling with guilt over the death of his father can be difficult to roleplay because guilt is an internal feeling that may not have any external elements to show. But with sacred plants, the character can talk to and battle against his own inner demons, just as he would against any other NPC.

Games are all about interaction, and by using sacred plants in your stories you will gain the ability to interact with the intangible.



EXAMPLES OF HEALING TECHNIQUES

- A Warrior suffered a wound during war, and while the wound appears healed, he has had uncontrollable anxiety ever since. The healer opens a cut on the place where the wound used to be and examines the blood that pours forth, looking at it, smelling it, and tasting it. She then announces that, because the wound was improperly treated, the Warrior's teyolia has bled away, taking his courage with it. She tells him to travel to the battlefield, reopen the wound, and give his battlecry in order to guide his lost soul back home. When the wound stops bleeding, he will know that it has returned. He should then bind it with clean cloth and a poultice of special herbs to seal it in.

- A pregnant woman fears that one of her enemies might try to use harmful medicine against her. The healer creates a bundle of protective plants and materials and directs the mother to wear it around her neck at all times. The healer periodically checks the bundle--if any of the leaves inside have turned black, it indicates that they have absorbed harmful medicine and that someone is indeed trying to harm the woman.

your thoughts, hopes, fears, and problems. The world within is a complicated realm with many places to hide. The three souls compete with one another and fill your mind with many different thoughts and desires. Meanwhile, all sorts of suggestions, temptations, guilts, and expectations flit about in the shadows.

So long as these things lurk unseen, you will have trouble making sense of them. But with the aid of sacred plants you are able to see them spring to life before you. Each thought has a body, each desire a symbol, and as you watch them interact with each other and with you you will be able to view your own psyche from the outside, and work out your problems by literally dealing with the metaphor of your own mind.

HARM

Medicine can be used to cause dreadful harm. The same lore and techniques that relieve sickness can also cause it. The same substances that bring such relief and understanding can also unleash terror and despair. The healer may decide whether or not to use these techniques to cause harm, but the power to do so is hers, for better or worse.

There are countless ways you can use medicine to harm others, but here are some basic methods that are common throughout Semanawak:

POISON

The difference between a cure and a poison is small--a slightly higher dose, a single extra ingredient, or even just the malevo-





lent will of the healer will do it. Poisons may come from plants or animals or even the Earth itself, and may have any number of effects. They can make people sick and nauseous, cause skin irritation, paralyze them, blind them, enslave their will, make them insane, or simply kill them.

Some examples:

- **Snake Venom:** Venom is the spirit of the serpent. By placing it in someone's body you grant that snake spirit complete access to their souls. The exact effects depend on the inclination of the individual snake, but snakes are predators at heart. Unless the victim comes to some arrangement with the spirit, he will be hunted down and devoured from the inside out.

- **Machineel Tree:** The spirit of this tree is extremely aggressive towards humans. Some say that humans offended the tree long, while others contest that the trees are prisons in which the gods trap the most violent, notorious spirits. Whatever the case, just about every part of the tree is extremely poisonous. Small drops of its sap cause horrible blisters and burns. Its small, apple-like fruits cause internal bleeding and death if eaten. Its leaves release a terrible choking smoke if burned that sears the lungs, turns breath into blood, and causes blindness. Even standing near the tree can be dangerous, for it is constantly surrounded by a toxic, malicious vapor.

- **Cinnabar:** This poison of the Earth is quite valuable. Many people use it to create beautiful sculptures and jewelry. Unlike other poisons, cinnabar does not contain a spirit itself. Instead, it is coveted by spirits, and incites jealousy and violence between them. Once cinnabar gets inside you, your souls begin to fight each other over it, just like humans fighting over a limited amount of treasure. They forget their duties and focus entirely on greed for the cinnabar, turning your body into a warzone. This leads to terrible tremors, loss of senses, hallucinations, madness, and eventually death.

SPIRIT PACTS

Sacred plants allow you to speak to the spirits, and you may say anything you wish. You may convince a spirit to leave your patient alone, or you may strike a deal that causes a spirit to attack your victim. Such deals often require some service from you, but if the spirits are already angry it may be very easy to turn them against someone. The effect of this depends on the spirit--animal spirits may attack, plant spirits may destroy crops, water spirits may capsize boats and drown people, and any spirit may enter through a wound or other injury and cause terrible illness and festering.

CURSE BUNDLES

A curse bundle is a wrapped up package containing plants and relic objects that together exude a powerful, toxic aura all around them. They are literal recipes for disaster. They stir up trouble between people and among the souls of individuals,

and can cause pretty much any problem imaginable, short of killing someone outright: arguments and fights, disobedience among children, laziness and fatigue, irresistible lust, hair loss, tooth loss, sterility, diarrhea and vomiting, and many other miseries.

A curse bundle affects the area around it, so in order to be effective you must hide it somewhere near your intended victim. It will take effect quickly, usually within a day or two, and will work for about a month before it rots into a bag full of foul black mush and loses its potency. However, if the victim escapes from its aura, the effects will clear up within a day or two. Therefore, it is important that you hide it somewhere that is difficult for the victim to avoid (like his house), and relocate it if necessary.

The bigger the bundle the larger the area it affects, but the harder it is to hide. A bundle the size of your finger must be on the victim's person in order to work (these are often hidden at the bottom of a traveler's backpack, so that it travels with them). A bundle the size of your head can affect an entire Household (these are often hidden on the roof or buried in the garden). A bundle the size of your body can affect an entire kalpuli (but will be tough to transport and hide).

You may target a curse bundle against a specific person. This requires that you incorporate blood or hair or some deeply significant personal object into the package. Without this targeting component, the bundle will affect everyone around it indiscriminately (including you, if you don't get rid of it quickly!).

DIVINATION

The world is both simpler and more complex than it appears. A farm field looks simple, but it is connected to many things: the farmer, the farmer's family, the family's kalpuli, the kalpuli's altepetl, and the Empire itself. It is a microcosm of all these things, a pond where ripples spread from far away.

The ebb and flow of empires and nations seems complicated. It involves thousands of people, thousands of farm fields, endless intrigue and scheming, and a multitude of individual stories. But despite this, the entire Empire is merely one small part of the great cosmic cycle of creation and destruction. It is a piece



"Waking a dreamer does not give you their dreams--it destroys them, and leaves the sleeper angry, confused, and afraid. Turning a watcher does not give you their vision--it forces them to see nothing but you. This is why humans invite so much wrath. In our efforts to understand, we destroy and we insert ourselves.

To dream the rock-dreams, you must sleep like the rock sleeps. To see the beast-sights, you must look as the animals look."

--Kwikatochtli (Singing Rabbit),
Tlamatini of Tlatlahako



of foam caught in the surf, subject to crashing waves, receding surge, the rise and fall of the tides, and the currents of the seasons.

The wisest diviners can judge the character of an altepetl simply by glancing at one of its farm fields, and they can foretell the future of the entire Empire by looking at the ever-changing sea and stars. If life is a song, diviners are the ones who keep the rhythm. If the world is a maze, they are the ones who have the map. They understand the larger shape of time, and they know where to look in order to see things long past or yet to come.

Many believe that divination is a passive art--the diviner looks at the stars and sees what is going to happen. Nothing could be further from the truth! Diviners use their knowledge and insight to plot courses through history, the way a boat travels across the ocean. Boaters use their knowledge of the weather and the tides in order to get to their intended destination and avoid hazards. So too do diviners use their knowledge of fate and cycles to steer civilization and avoid the rocks and shoals of time.

METHODS OF DIVINATION

Just as a traveler may intuit the current of a river by dipping a stick into the water, dropping a handful of sand into it, or simply watching the ripples and vortices on the surface, so too do diviners have many means of revealing the unseen currents of time. Different methods reveal different truths, and appeal to different diviners (though whether these preferences are rational or purely arbitrary is anyone's guess).

CALENDARS

Life, the ability to exist for a span of time, is the greatest gift given to humans by the gods. But second only to life are the calendars, for they teach humans how to understand the time they have been given. Invented by Ximekatl, the goddess of lore, the calendars are a guide to the repeating cycles of time. Humans have always counted the days, but the calendars tell humans how to group them and what these groups mean. They allow people to plan for the future, record the past, and make sense of the present.

They are tools that help humans survive, and also guides for when it is time to die.

THE DAY

There is an old saying in Semanawak: "History is measured in lifetimes." This saying perfectly illustrates the concept of Truth in Semanawak, because it is true on all levels. All things in history, from individuals to tribes to entire nations, are born, live, die, and are then remembered and thus reborn. Such periods are the chapters of history.

But Truth and Humor are married in Semanawak, and the joke is that the saying is also true on the most mundane level. Each



"A man standing in the middle of a forest can only see a short distance in any direction. Trees tower over him and obscure his vision. He cannot see hills or rivers until he is right upon them. It is easy for him to become lost.

But a man standing on top of a mountain can see the forest for what it is--one feature among many that is part of the larger landscape. He can see where the forest begins, where it ends, where there are clearings, and where the rivers flow through it. He sees the forest in the context of the world.

Divination is the art of climbing the mountain so we can see our way through the forest of the world."

Weykatlachiani (Far-Sighted), Moon Priestess of Teoyezteko

day is a lifetime of the Sun--birth (dawn), maturity (passage from east to west), death (dusk), journey through the Underworld (night), and finally rebirth (the next dawn). And each calendar is merely a different way to count the days.

In short, the Day is the most basic unit of time in Semanawak, the lifetime by which all other lifetimes are measured.

Time within a single day is very informal. Just as there are four sacred directions on Earth, there are four points in each day: Dawn, Noon, Dusk, and Midnight (the fifth direction, Center, is the axis around which the other four rotate). The time between these points forms the Quarters of the day, during which different activities are scheduled. There are no hours or minutes within each Quarter, so people usually plan to meet and begin and end work at one of the four points. You may refer to the height of the Sun if you need to be more specific, but this is always subjective.

THE XIUHPOWALI [SOLAR CALENDAR]

The people of Semanawak use many calendars, but one of the most important is the solar calendar, the Xiuhpowali. It tracks the solar year, the regular progression of the seasons and the journey of the Sun back and forth across the horizon, from solstice to equinox to solstice and back again. It allows the people to plan planting, harvesting, and other agricultural activities, and also track the timing of agricultural and seasonal festivals.

The solar year of Semanawak is 360 days long. This count is divided up into weeks and months--five days to a week, four weeks to a month, and eighteen months to a year. Each of these smaller units tracks its own cycle, and in some ways they could be considered calendars themselves. The week tracks the labor cycle (four days of work, and then Market Day on the fifth) and the month tracks the festival cycle (every twenty days there is a religious ceremony to attend to).





In addition to the 360 bright days of the Xiuhpowali, there is an extra week of dark days at the end. These are known as the Nemontemi, or nameless days. Nobody knows for sure why they exist. Some say that they are the tribute that Wey-sitlalin grants to Xolokwani in order to keep him from causing too much trouble. Others say they are an offering given by all the gods to Teomochi, a sacrifice of time to the one who created it. Still others say that they are a crack in the shape of time itself, a gap through which the dark waters of misfortune pour in from... elsewhere. Further confusing the issue is the fact that every four years there must be an extra nemontemi day, an extra sacrifice of time to keep the universe steady.

Whatever their origin, the nemontemi days are a time of great danger and instability. Dark gods and spirits walk the Earth, preying upon all they find and looking for ways to cause harm and mischief. Consequently, all activity stops during this week. Nobody works, travels, or even goes outside. Instead, people spend the week huddled in their homes and praying. Children born or named during these days are doomed to lives of hardship and trouble, subject to the influence of the dark gods and the suspicions of others who fear this influence.

THE TONALPOWALI [SACRED CALENDAR]

The other major calendar is the Tonalpowali, which tracks the sacred year. Unlike the Xiuhpowali, which is tied to the physical position of the Sun over time, the Tonalpowali is not anchored to any obvious object in the physical world. No astronomical event indicates when it begins or ends. The Priests of old simply started counting one day, and this count has endured for ages. If the Priests of today lost count, it would be impossible to determine the correct date on the Tonalpowali. It is an eternal flame that must be forever fed, or it will burn out and leave humans in darkness.

Despite this, the cycles of the Tonalpowali have an uncanny tendency to appear in seemingly unrelated events across the world. Every known culture in Semanawak uses the Tonalpowali, but curiously, no two cultures use it in the same way. The Alka'balum use it for planting and tracking the highly variable rain cycle in the Jungle. The Kakayawani use it to track the cycle of the morning and evening star and the unseen activities of the Tzitzimime. Each has found a different use for its cycles, a different truth that its count reveals. It is a map, not a set of directions for a particular destination.

The sacred year of the Tonalpowali is 260 days long, and is composed of two smaller cycles: a thirteen day number count (numbers 1 through 13), and a twenty day daysign count. Each daysign represents a plant, animal, or other important spiritual concept. The progression of daysigns is listed to the right.

It works like this: the first day of the Tonalpowali is 1-Caiman, the first number paired with the first daysign. The next day is 2-Wind, then 3-House, and so on. After 13-Reed, the number cycle resets, but the daysign cycle continues, so the day after 13-Reed is 1-Jaguar. After 7-Flower, the daysign cycle resets, but the number cycle continues, so the day after 7-Flower is 8-Caiman.

These two cycles continue, each beginning and ending and starting up again and gradually shifting around each other. Each 13 day number cycles is like a sacred week, and each 20 day daysign cycle like a month. Each number and daysign combination is unique, and there are 260 of them. But after 260 days, both cycles meet up again at 1-Caiman, and the next sacred year begins.

Uses of the Tonalpowali in the Empire

The Xiuhpowali governs agricultural festivals, but there are several others governed by the Tonalpowali instead. 1-Caiman is always celebrated with offerings to Sipaktli, the goddess who presides over that day, as well as tribute to Ximekatl, in

- **CAIMAN**



- **WIND**



- **HOUSE**



- **LIZARD**



- **SNAKE**



- **DEATH**



- **DEER**



- **RABBIT**



- **WATER**



- **DOG**



- **MONKEY**



- **GRASS**



- **REED**



- **JAGUAR**



- **EAGLE**



- **VULTURE**



- **MOVEMENT**



- **FLINT**



- **RAIN**



- **FLOWER**



recognition of her calendar gift. Most Tonalpowali ceremonies are not large festivals, however. They mostly concern Priests, who spend their lives keeping track of these days.

The people of the Empire use the Tonalpowali to determine the nature of their children. Each day is unique and bestows a unique fortune on children named on that day. Some days are very lucky, while others are positively disastrous. But in addition to general luckiness, each day is also associated with certain personality traits and certain career aptitudes. This means that parents have a great deal of choice for determining their child's future. By choosing what day to name the child on, they influence who their child will become.

In addition, the Tonalpowali name day also affects who you can and can't marry. Certain name days are compatible or incompatible with others. In order to evaluate a match, the Matchmaker takes the number of each person's name day and adds them together, giving totals of 2-26. Each total has a compatibility and fortune attached to it, which are listed in a special compatibility codex. Good matches ensure a tranquil homelife and great prosperity. Bad matches result in domestic discord, infidelity, and poverty.

Even a good match has the potential of falling apart, so in addition to the general strength of a match the Matchmaker also advises the couple on what challenges they are likely to face. For example, some matches might result in great prosperity but will be prone to infidelity, and so, as long as the couple makes a special effort to guard against that, they can avoid that hazard.

THE NEW FIRE CEREMONY

The Xiuhpowali and Tonalpowali each track different cycles, but every 52 years these cycles converge. The first day of the Xiuhpowali and the first day of the Tonalpowali occur on the same day, and the universe arrives at a deadly cosmic crossroad--will it continue on into the next 52 year cycle, or will the Sun die and end everything that is? This is the time of the New Fire ceremony.

The last time it was performed was during the Tonalteka rebellion against the Kakayawani. Brave Ollin offered his heart to Xochisiwatzin's blade, and afterwards she placed a fire spindle in his chest and ignited the sacred flame that burns today at Tleteoxiwakan. The fires that burn in every community today ultimately come from that sacred flame, and therefore the light that shines upon everyone originates in Tleteoxiwakan.

But this fire must be renewed every 52 years, every time the calendars converge. The Priests must gather again at Tleteoxiwakan with another worthy offering while the people of the Empire extinguish all fire and all light. They must extinguish the old fire and relight a new one in the chest of a hero. They must then take this fire to all cities and towns to relight their fires and spread light across the world again.

So long as the light of Tleteoxiwakan burns across Semanawak,

the Empire will endure and the world will continue. But if the Priests fail to renew it, the light will falter and die.

If the world is ever going to end, it will be during the New Fire ceremony, at the junction of its 52 year cycle.

ASTROLOGY

The movements of the stars reveal the movements of the gods and spirits about Semanawak. Just as a boulder causes ripples when it falls into the water, so too do the gods cause ripples across the universe when they move through it. Astrologers read the stars like a boatman reading the currents of a river. They see what is coming, what has gone, and what exists now but lies hidden. They may steer clear of dangerous rapids. Or they may use them to accelerate themselves.

Methods of astrology vary from humble to extravagant. Some astrologers use nothing but their eyes. They note where on the horizon different astral bodies rise or set at and relate them to other landmarks, most notably mountain peaks. Where, when, and how such bodies appear reveal a great deal to a knowledgeable stargazer. Using these methods they can track the progression of the seasons and spot a wide variety of omens, though their insight is usually limited to broad, sweeping events.

Astrologers who seek greater precision and more specific insight often make use of cross staves. These tools are simply walking sticks with large X's on top of them, but in skilled hands they allow a person to precisely measure the angles and attitudes of stars and compare them to features of the landscape. The relationship between stars and the land reveal their influence upon the Earth, and the more precisely one can measure this, the more specific the knowledge one can glean.

The deepest knowledge, however, can only be revealed using entire structures dedicated to astrology. The temples and palaces of Semanawak, in addition to their other functions, also serve as titanic observatories. The angles of their walls, the locations of windows, and the layout of the rooms are all specifically designed for high precision stargazing. Rather than relying on natural landmarks alone, such buildings provide a huge number of architectural landmarks that may be used to measure and understand the heavens.





NAWAL SORCERY

Few people in Semanawak are more misunderstood and feared than Nawal Sorcerers. They live on the fringes of society, drifting from village to village, city to city, kalpuli to kalpuli. They are nomads by necessity, tolerated and sought out for their unique gifts but rarely allowed to remain because of the resentment they generate. Many more than deserve the fearsome reputation their kind have earned over the years, but there are plenty who use their talents to help others and try to overcome the age old prejudice.

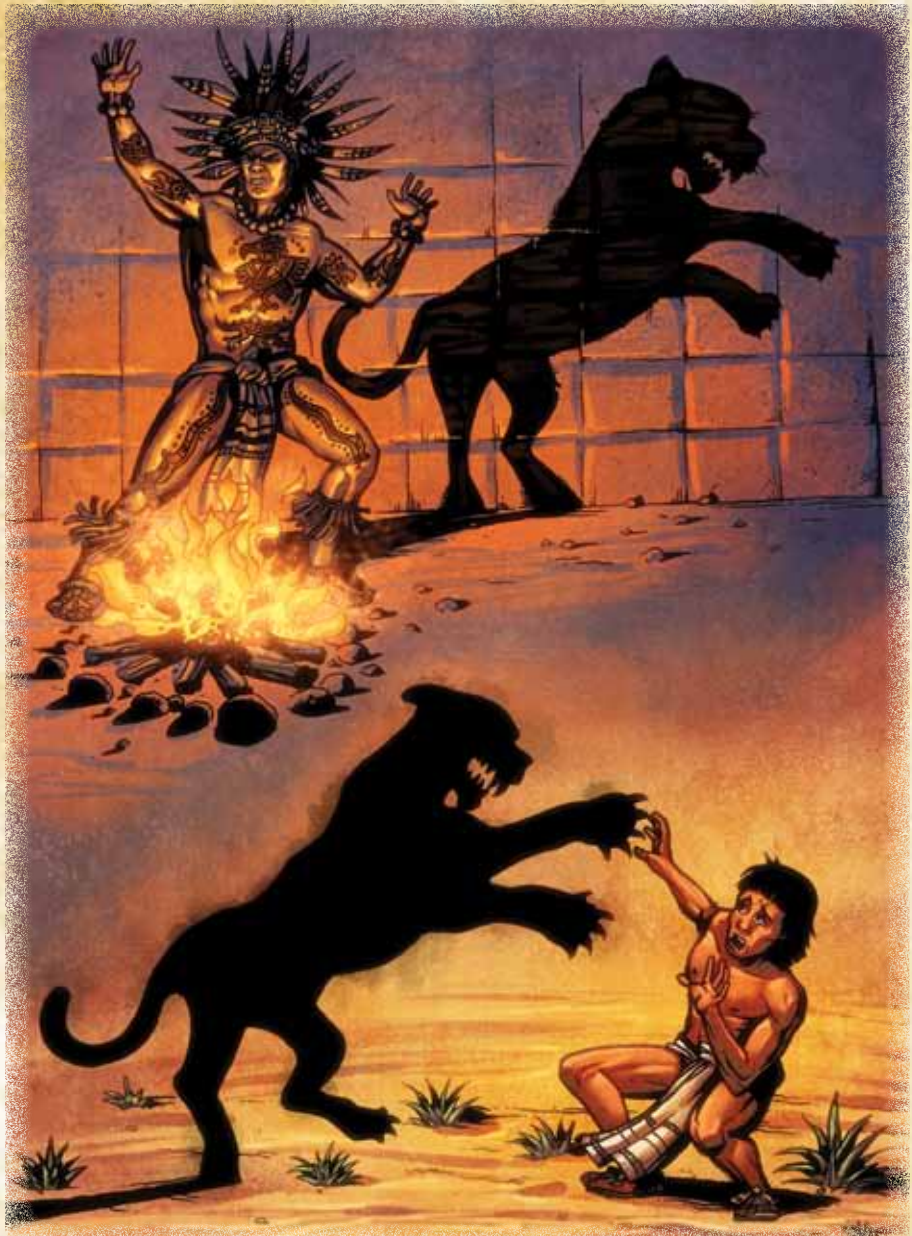
Regardless of who they are, where they come from, or how they use their gifts, they all possess a truly unique power: the ability to communicate with the powerful spirits known as Nawals.

THE NATURE OF NAWALS

There is a famous story about a Jaguar Warrior who was consumed with hatred towards his brother because his brother had married the woman the Jaguar Warrior loved. The law of his kalpuli stated that he must accept the situation and go back to loving his brother, but he simply could not do it. His anger grew and grew, until one night he saw the two of them walking together one evening. As they stopped to kiss, a jaguar suddenly sprang out of the night, killed them, and tore off their faces with its terrible fangs. It then vanished into the darkness. The Warrior fell to his knees in anguish and turned himself in for murder, because he knew the jaguar was his nawal. The strength of his jealousy and anger caused it to attack those he hated and bring his deepest, ugliest feelings to life.

A Nawal is an animal that is spiritually connected to a person. All people gain a Nawal when they receive their name, and from then on it follows them everywhere. Nawals are physical beings, but they are extremely evasive and rarely allow themselves to be seen. Even when they are seen, they look no different than ordinary animals.

Nawals are the "shape of your soul," the physical form that your Tonal takes. They are part of you, the same soul in a different body. But whereas you must live in society and learn manners, morality, and politics to survive, Nawals have no such constraints. They are you in your most raw, natural form.



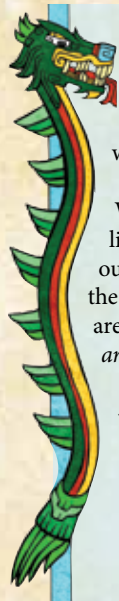
"Many believe that Nawals are vile creatures, four-legged vice forever lurking behind our backs. But those who truly understand them know differently.

Nawals are indeed the things about us that cannot bear to live in the same body as the rest of us. But many of these things are virtuous. Selfless generosity is no more at home in a human body than unbridled greed. Perfect love is no more at home than perfect hate. Nawals carry these things as well, and those who are truly wise love them for it.

Those who are truly wise invite our children back into the house of the body. By embracing our animal reflections, we discover the true nature, and the true potential, of humanity."

--Saknite (White Flower),
Nawal Sorcerer of Ichtakayotlan





"We are all born with twins. They live in our shadows, in our reflections, in the corners of our eyes, in the thoughts that pass through us like mysterious breezes. They know where we look. They know what we see.

We cannot hide from these mirror twins. We cannot lie to them. They feel our desire, our hunger, our fear, our anger. They see past the living masks we wear and the lofty words we say. They know us for what we truly are--animals. They see these things in us, because they *are* these things in us. They are our Nawals."

--Weyman (Venerable Time),
Nawal Sorcerer of Ichtakayotlan

Most of the time, Nawals are content to remain unseen. They are associated with your Tonalì soul, and therefore closely tied to you shadow and your reflection. It is said that when you look in a mirror your Nawal is always somewhere in the reflection. You may feel them stir within you, and you may feel their hungry gaze upon you, but your human mind will remain in control. It is only in times of great emotion that your Nawal will overcome your human squeamishness and take action. This is why parents caution their children against holding grudges or wishing others ill--if you wish for something hard enough, your Nawal just might take it for you.

Many people try to separate themselves from their animal halves. They prefer to think of Nawals not as parts of themselves, but as separate spirits that just happen to follow them. But those who are wise know differently: if a human is cut, her Nawal bleeds. If a Nawal is cut, its human bleeds. Your lives are one, and cannot ever be pulled apart.

If one of you dies, so does the other.

MAGIC AND NAWALS

Nawal Sorcerers are individuals who have the ability to see and communicate with Nawals and with normal animals. They are uniquely in touch with their animal nature, and also with the animal natures of others. Rather than shut out this part of themselves, they embrace it, and so receive many extraordinary abilities.

The most famous Nawal Sorcerer power is shapeshifting. Nawal Sorcerers are incredibly close to their animals selves, and so they may freely switch forms with them. Their human bodies fade into the shadows as they dance, leaving only the animal. Nawal Sorcerers may take a benign form, like a turkey or dog, and use it to move about unnoticed. They may take a powerful form, like a caiman or a jaguar, and wreak havoc upon their enemies. They may take a mobile form, like an eagle or a

vulture, and travel the world freely. And at any time, they may revert to their human form.

Unlike most people, who go their entire lives with only one Nawal, Nawal Sorcerers are able to form bonds with many Nawals at the same time. Most will share their souls with two or three other creatures, but the most powerful individuals have entire menageries accompanying them and can shift between countless forms, almost like a god shifting from rain to river to fish and to cloud.

Forming these bonds is not easy, however. Nawals only come into existence when a human child is named, and die whenever their human form dies. In order to gain new Nawal forms, Sorcerers must steal away the Nawals of others. Sometimes this happens peacefully--a Nawal Sorcerer who happens upon a dying person might be able to bond with his Nawal before it dies. But it usually involves violence--the Nawal Sorcerer murders someone and forcibly steals his Nawal. In particularly awful cases the Sorcerer might even convince the victim's Nawal to betray its human.

In addition to these dramatic powers, Nawal Sorcerers also have several that are far more subtle. Nawal Sorcerers can speak with the infinitely honest animal half of you. They can learn your secret desires and jealousies directly from your Nawal, no matter how hard you try to hide them as a human. This often makes them seem like mind readers, but they are not reading your mind--they are simply speaking to your Nawal. Nawals care for their humans and won't deliberately betray them, but they are naive and unconcerned with appearances. They are usually more than willing to spill your secrets to a Sorcerer who asks nicely. And they are often willing to do that Sorcerer favors, which can make their human halves vulnerable to suggestion and influence.

Sympathetic Nawal Sorcerers may use this deep insight to help you. Any sickness that affects you also affects your Nawal, and vice versa. Normal healers can only see your human form, and therefore they can only see what you choose to show them. But Nawal Sorcerers see past your facade. They can ask questions you would never answer and get answers. Many illnesses in Semanawak come from an imbalance within, and few humans are willing to discuss such things. But Nawals cannot help but be honest. For this reason, Nawal Sorcerers are often skilled healers.

However, this same ability also makes them extremely dangerous. They can uncover your deepest secrets and fears and use them against you. They can also attack you from afar by attacking your Nawal. You will be walking down the street one day and suddenly feel a jaguar's claws slashing open your back, only to turn and see nothing there. By hunting down and injuring your Nawal, a Nawal Sorcerer inflicts those same injuries upon your human form. By luring and capturing your Nawal, a Nawal Sorcerer can hold you hostage, for if your Nawal dies, so do you. And by winning over and turning your Nawal against





you, a Nawal Sorcerer can literally split your psyche in half and drive you hopelessly insane.

All these powers have a cost, however. Their closeness to the Nawals places Sorcerers constantly on the edge between human and animal. Sometimes they cannot help but cross over. Even under normal conditions, Nawal Sorcerers are extremely emotional and prone to odd ticks and mannerisms. They exude an aura of strangeness that most find very unsettling. During times of great stress they may involuntarily switch into their animal form, unable to hold it at bay. Alternatively, their human form might give way to the animal instincts within, leading to extremely odd behavior. They may feel an irresistible urge to shed their clothes like a rabbit breaking free of a snare, or an intense craving for rotten carrion like a vulture seeking a place to feed.

Most of the time, Nawals serve the Sorcerer. But sometimes the Sorcerer cannot help but serve the Nawals.

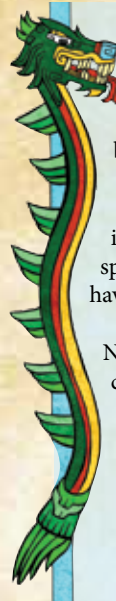
NAWAL SORCERERS IN SOCIETY

Nawal Sorcerers usually discover their powers during childhood. They speak to animals who tell them the dark secrets of others. Their shadows take on strange, bestial forms when they get upset. They quickly learn that the things they wish for tend to come true. Many inadvertently kill someone with their secret thoughts before they learn control. But few are able to remain undetected forever. Sooner or later, their friends and neighbors realize what they are. And from that point on, no one will ever see them the same ever again.

The first step is to transfer them to knowledgeable authorities. Ideally, this means another Nawal Sorcerer, who can counsel them and help them develop proper control. If no Nawal Sorcerer can be found, they usually grow up under the guidance of local Priests. This is always difficult, however, because the Priests cannot fully understand the nature of the Nawal Sorcerer's powers. They often give flawed and sometimes downright harmful guidance. But regardless, there is no "proper schooling" for Nawal Sorcerers. There is an individual gift that the individual must master alone. You cannot teach someone to be a Nawal Sorcerer. You can only help them learn.

Nawal Sorcerers are sometimes allowed to study at the Telpochkali or Kalmekak, though this is a bitter time because they are inevitably singled out. Fools may try to bully them, but most will simply avoid them. Teachers will blame them for every mysterious thing that goes wrong. The knowledge gained at school can be helpful, but most Nawal Sorcerers are happy to leave.

After Sorcerers graduate or get kicked out of normal school, they are on their own. They may be allowed to remain in the community, but they will never really be members. They must pay others for food and services, and they may be asked to leave at any time. Most Nawal Sorcerers end up selling their services to others, healing and harming for payment in order



"Nawals are animals, there is no doubt. They are fierce and impatient, hungry and violent, greedy and spiteful, cruel and merciless. But they are also honest. Nawals are the animals that live within us, but they are also us at our most honest.

Honesty does not come naturally to humans. We fear it, often with good reason. We dream of murder in response to insults, of lust in response to those we cannot have.

Nawals carry our honesty for us. They are our shameful children, the parts of ourselves we cannot allow to live in the house of our body."

--Tilipotonkwi (Feathered in Black),
Nawal Sorcerer on the road to Popokatetlan

to scratch out a meager living.

Sooner or later, all Nawal Sorcerers acquire enemies. Victims of their power will hate them, while others may grow resentful if a Nawal Sorcerer is too successful. Because they are not technically members of the community, Nawal Sorcerers are not protected by any laws, and can be attacked or harassed with impunity. Of course, only a fool would do this lightly, since Nawal Sorcerers have the power to cause tremendous misery to those who displease them. The best a Sorcerer can hope for is an uneasy stalemate, where enemies are too afraid to act.

But this rarely lasts for long. Eventually enough people will become angry and the Nawal Sorcerer will be asked to leave. Many Nawal Sorcerers are used to this, and quickly move on when asked. Some might even leave before being asked, once they sense popular sentiment turning against them. But others may refuse. In this case, the people might attack the Sorcerer and either kill or drive him away. However, in some places (particularly in small villages) the people may not be able to defeat the Nawal Sorcerer. Some Nawal Sorcerers may actually take over under such circumstances!

There is only one place in Semanawak where Nawal Sorcerers are welcome, and most don't even believe it really exists. That place is the hidden village of Ichtakayotlan, the Place of Secrets, perched high atop the dark mount Teixtli. Many Nawal Sorcerers spend their whole lives searching for it. Most never find it. Those who are lucky finally find a place where they belong. But there are a cursed few who are rejected even by their own kind.

They are some of the most terrible villains Semanawak has ever known.



THE FIVE SUNS LEGEND, PART 5

As told by Teoxiwił (Precious Turquoise), Singing Priestess of Ilwikakalko.

THE FOURTH SUN

The gods once again gathered at Tlteoxiwakan, the place where the Fourth Sun was born, and looked up at Ehekamitotiani, floating high in the sky where Elopahiliztli had once been. His voice howled across the land like a gale, echoing off the mountains and valleys:

“This world needs a new Sun! I am the noblest and most honorable of us all. It was I who ended the battle to create the world. It was I who drove back the rising tides and created the cycle of life and death. I shall be the new Sun. You may watch as I make this world right!”

And so the gods at Tlteoxiwakan gathered in a circle and gazed up at Ehekamitotiani, floating in the sky, and in an instant he began to glow with a clean white light, bathing the landscape in illumination once again.

Ehekamitotiani fixed his gaze on Tlteoxiwakan and on the new clouds in the sky and let loose a mighty eagle scream. His scream spread across the world, calling to everything noble and proud, and from behind the clouds emerged flying people adorned with beautiful feathers of every color imaginable. They flew and danced and sang from mountain peak to mountain peak, filling the world with colors and flowers and music. From Ehekamitotiani the White Sun, the Wind People were born.

PEOPLE OF THE WIND

Ehekamitotiani taught his Wind People many things. He taught them speed and athleticism so they could fly and fight effortlessly, as well as dance with peerless grace. He taught them how to see everything, from flowers to enemies to prey, how to hear everything, from music to poems to food, and how to make the most of all the glorious senses to enjoy and appreciate the world and the many fine things in it. At first the Wind People were shy and reserved, but Ehekamitotiani also taught them how to be proud and bold so that their beauty and nobility could not be ignored. He taught them these things, and then told them to use these virtues to find meaning and nourish the gods.

And so the Wind People used what they had learned, and flew and flew and flew. They flew in long, breathtaking dances across the entire sky. They sang beautiful songs that filled the world from sky peak to lowest cave. They hunted and fought in honorable contests and won much glory for themselves. But the greater their accomplishments, the greater their pride. They grew more and more beautiful, but also more and more vain. They spent so much time preening and practicing their dancing that they began to neglect the necessities of life and the raising of their own Wind Children. Eventually, none of

them were willing to do anything except display their beauty and skill, and were unwilling to grant a single kind word to anyone. Even to the gods. So in love with themselves were they that they scorned their creators in favor of their own glory.

DYING DANCES

The other gods watched as the Wind People danced and turned their back on them and each other, and they were sad. Weysitlalin murmured something softly, but no one else heard her, so they assumed she was also sad. Oleletletl, furious at the arrogance and pompousness of the Wind People, returned to Tlteoxiwakan and from there leapt up into the sky and flew straight into Ehekamitotiani's face, blocking out his light and plunging the world into darkness. Oleletletl pointed down to the world and spoke:

“Look, great Ehekamitotiani! Your world is fading and your people do not care! They may dance and sing for some time yet, and their beauty will last for a few more years, but soon it will fade and they will die, and there will be nothing left but moldy feathers and wilted flowers! But their own fleeting glory is so important to them that they think of nothing permanent, nothing lasting, like their own children or us, their creators! Your people fly charmingly, but their lives are as empty as a cloudless sky! Art brings no glory when it inspires pettiness rather than greatness. Your people are dancers who watch only themselves, and then die. Look, great Ehekamitotiani!”

But though he looked down at the world, Ehekamitotiani could not see the truth of Oleletletl's words. Ehekamitotiani watched his beautiful but narcissistic children, and though they had turned their back on him as well as everything else but themselves he saw his creation as beautiful, for what parent can see anything else in their children?

RAIN OF FIRE

And so they fought. Ehekamitotiani sang a stirring war song and blew with all his might against Oleletletl. But mighty Oleletletl could not be pushed back, could not be extinguished. He reached without flinching into the heart of Ehekamitotiani's winds and wrapped his hand around his throat. The singing and the winds stopped, and though Oleletletl could have crushed Ehekamitotiani's throat and voice right then, he had discipline and the restraint of a soldier protecting the world, and simply threw him down from the sky. Ehekamitotiani landed far to the east, scattering feathers across the world and letting out a great groan. That is why today birds of many feathers blow around the world from season to season, flying here and there and never settling in one place for long. The groan of his landing is why the prevailing winds in these lands always blow in from the East, where he landed.

Oleletletl then stared sternly down at the soft and superfluous Wind People, and from his eyes fell a blazing hot rain of fire, falling through the skies and pooling up in the nests of the Wind People. They cried out defiantly and fought against





the flames, but as they blew them the flames only grew larger and larger, consuming the air and their songs and burning their pretty feathers into soot. When the flames at last died down, the skies were empty and the world was quiet. Oleletletl looked over the world again from on high, but then obediently stepped down and yielded the sky to the next Sun, as a true soldier should.

VULTURES LAND

As the Wind People died, Xolokwani slunk across the world and snuck up behind some of the Wind People and knocked them out with a blow to the head. He dragged their feathered bodies and threw them down a deep hole that only he knew of. This hole lead to a secret corner beneath the earth, down in the Underworld, and after stealing the Wind People Xolokwani returned to Tletoxiwakan and pretended he was never gone. Weysitlalin saw what he had done and murmured something softly, but no one else heard her, not even Xolokwani, so they assumed that everything was fine.



RULES OF THE GAME

New Fire is a storytelling game where players take turns narrating and determining the outcomes of the various situations they encounter. The end of one person's narration is the beginning of the next person's narration. Character and themes are the building blocks you use to guide your narration.

CORE MECHANICS

Most of New Fire is just talking. You describe what you want your character to do, you say what you want your character to say, and you state what you want to happen. The Giver of Life (the Gamemaster of New Fire) then responds, answering questions and describing how the world reacts. The other Players may respond as well. You then respond to their responses, and by playing off of each other, a story emerges.

If everyone agrees about the way the story is going, the story continues without interruption. But if somebody thinks the story should go in a different direction, they may Challenge the narrative.

CHALLENGES

Issuing a Challenge is easy. All you have to do is say "I Challenge" and briefly describe what you think should happen instead. If the person being Challenged likes your idea, he or she may back down. But otherwise, we turn to the dice.

New Fire uses 10-sided dice to resolve Challenges. For each Challenge you (a Player) will throw a certain number of dice, depending on your character's stats and how much you want to win the Challenge. You can throw a maximum of 10 dice on a roll. You will then select up to 3 of those thrown dice to hold. You add the values on your held dice together, and that total is your Result for the roll. You then compare that Result to the Target Number (TN), set by the Giver.

The fewer held dice it takes a Player to equal or exceed the TN, the greater that Player's narrative control over the outcome of the Challenge.

The Giver controls the TN. She may Challenge Players and Players may Challenge her, but she never rolls dice herself. Only the Players roll.

There are two kinds of Challenges: those between a Player and the Giver, and those between two or more Players. The mechanics are similar, but there are a few slight differences.

PLAYER VS GIVER CHALLENGES

If a single Player disagrees with the Giver on the direction of the story, or if the Giver disagrees with the Player, then a Challenge occurs between the two of them.

First, the Giver sets the TN. This represents the minimum result necessary for the Player to get at least some narrative control in the Challenge. The default TN is always 20, but the Giver can raise or lower it by using Fortune Points (more on those below).

Once the TN is set, the Player spends Fortune Points to decide how many dice he or she will throw, and then throws those dice. The outcomes are as follows:

- **Dawn Roll**--The Player hits (equals or exceeds) the TN on a single held die. The Player gets complete narrative control over the outcome of the Challenge.

- **Noon Roll**--The Player hits the TN on 2 held dice. The Player narrates the outcome, but must incorporate/abide by a Condition set by the Giver.

- **Dusk Roll**--The Player hits the TN on 3 held dice. The Giver narrates the outcome, but must incorporate/abide by a Condition set by the Player.

- **Night Roll**--The Player cannot hit the TN even with 3 dice. The Giver gets complete narrative control over the outcome.

PLAYER VS PLAYER CHALLENGES

If two or more Players disagree about the direction of the story, they may Challenge each other for control of the outcome. This is only possible if the Player Characters are both involved (though not necessarily physically present) in the scene--you cannot Challenge in scenes your character has nothing to do with. It is possible for the Giver to end up with some degree of narrative control, even in Player vs Player Challenges.

First, the Giver sets the TN as described above. She can raise or lower the TN if she wishes.

Once the TN is set, Players spend Fortune Points to determine how many dice they will throw, and then throw them. The possible outcomes are as follows:

- If all Players get Night Rolls (cannot hit the TN even on 3 held dice), the Giver gets complete narrative control over the outcome.

- If all but one Player gets a Night Roll, the Challenge is resolved like a Player vs GM Challenge.

- If multiple Players get better than Night Rolls, the Player with the best roll (the one who hit the TN with the fewest held dice) narrates, while the second best Player sets a Condition.



- If two or more Players tie for fewest held dice, the one with the highest total on those held dice narrates while the second highest sets a Condition.

- If two or more Players are still tied, each rolls a single die to break the tie.

EXPLODING DICE

When a die rolls a 10, it “explodes”—that is, you roll it again, add the value of the second roll to the value of the first roll, and count the total as a single die. For example, if a die rolls a 10 and then a 7, that single die counts as a 17.

A single die may explode multiple times. For example, if a die comes up as 10, it explodes. Roll it again. If it comes up 10 again, it explodes again, and so on until you stop rolling 10's. But no matter how many times a single die explodes, it still counts as only one die, and may be held as such.

In examples this is written like this: 10+10+5, indicating a single die that rolled a 10, then another 10, and then a 5, counting for a total of 25.

EXAMPLE: PLAYER VS GIVER

Josh (a Player) Challenges Michel (the Giver). Michel sets the TN at 20 (the default), and Josh throws 5 dice and gets 15 (10+5 exploding die), 7, 5, 4, and 1. Josh can hit the TN by holding two dice (the 15 and the 7), so he can achieve a Noon roll—he may narrate while incorporating a Condition set by Michel.

If Michel had lowered the TN to 15, Josh would have been able to hit it by holding just one die (the 15). In this case, he would have achieved a Dawn roll—he would get complete narrative control of the outcome.

If Michel had increased the TN to 25, Josh would have had to hold three dice in order to hit it (the 15, the 7, and the 5). In this case, he would have achieved a Dusk roll—Michel would get to narrate, but Josh would get to set a Condition.

If Josh had only thrown 4 dice (and not gotten the 15), he wouldn't have been able to hit a TN 20 even by holding three dice (his three best would be 7, 5, and 4 for a total of 19). In this case, he would have gotten a Night roll—Michel would have gotten complete narrative control.

EXAMPLE: PLAYER VS PLAYER

Arturo challenges Stephanie. Both of them are Players. Michel (the Gamemaster) sets the TN at 20 (the default). Arturo throws 5 dice and gets 14 (10+4 exploding die), 7, 3, 2, and 1. Stephanie throws 4 dice and gets 9, 9, 8, and 3. Arturo can hit the TN by holding two dice (the 14 and the 7), and Stephanie can hit it by holding three dice (the 9, the 9, and the 8). Because Arturo can hit the TN by holding the fewest dice, he may narrate while incorporating a Condition set by Stephanie.



You may find it convenient to arrange your thrown dice from highest to lowest. Start with your highest value die—if it doesn't equal or exceed the TN, add the value of the second highest. If you still haven't hit the TN, add the value of the third highest. If you are unable to equal or exceed the TN by holding your 3 highest dice, you will know that you have lost narrative control over the situation.

If Michel had lowered the TN to 15, then both Arturo and Stephanie would be able to hit it by holding two dice—Arturo by holding the 14 and the 7, and Stephanie by holding the 9 and the 8. They would tie for fewest dice. But because Arturo's total is higher (14+7=21) than Stephanie's (9+9=18), he would narrate while incorporating a Condition set by Stephanie.

If Michel had increased the TN to 25, then Stephanie would be able to hit it by holding three dice (the 9, the 9, and the 8). Arturo would not be able to hit it even by holding three dice (14+7+3=24). In this case, Michel would narrate while incorporating a condition set by Stephanie.

FORTUNE POINTS

The number of dice you roll during Challenges depends on your character stats and how you spend a narrative resource known as Fortune Points. All Players start out with 13 Fortune Points. The Giver starts out 2 Fortune Points for each Player in the game.

For Players, each Fortune Point you spend on a Challenge allows you to call up one Stat or Theme that your character possesses. If you call up a Stat, you throw dice equal to the rank of a Stat. If you call up a Theme, you always add 3 dice.

You may call up multiple Stats and multiple Themes for a Challenge. However, you can only call up Stats and Themes that relate to the Challenge, as judged by the Giver and the other Players.

For example, say you wish to call up your Force stat (a measure of your strength and willingness to use it) in the middle of a brawl, and your Force stat has a rank of 4. By spending 1 Fortune Point, you would be able to add 4 dice to that roll.

Say that you also wanted to call up the character Theme 'Itching for a Fight' (an indication of your character's violent nature). By spending another Fortune Point you would be able to add 3 more dice to the roll (Themes always add 3 dice), for a total of 6 dice.

You would not, however, be able to spend a Fortune Point to call up your Medicine stat, because it has nothing to do with brawling (unless you can come up with a plausible reason for it).



You do not have to spend all your Fortune Points at once. You may spend some, throw the dice, calculate the result, and then spend more to throw more dice and try to get a better result. When you are unwilling or unable to spend any more Fortune Points, you must accept whatever result you have.

However, regardless of Stats, Themes, or Fortune Points, you may never throw more than 10 dice on any single Challenge. Once you have thrown your 10th die on a Challenge, you are done.

Finally, in order to participate in a Challenge, you must spend at least enough Fortune Points to allow you to throw a minimum of 3 dice. If you are unable or unwilling to do this, you cannot Challenge. This ensures that all participants in a Challenge are at least somewhat serious about contributing, and have at least some chance of succeeding.

THE GIVER OF LIFE AND FORTUNE POINTS

For the Giver, Fortune Points work a little differently. The Giver may spend up to 2 Fortune Points to increase the TN of a roll, and may regain up to 2 Fortune Points by lowering the TN. Each Fortune Point spent increases the TN by 5, and each Fortune Point regained decreases it by 5. In either case, the Giver must call up a plausible Theme for each Fortune Point spent or regaining to justify the change.

If the Giver wishes to issue a Challenge, she must spend 1 Fortune Point to do so. If she is Challenged by a Player she may oppose for free.

The Giver may increase the TN for any Challenge she is involved in. However, she may only decrease it when she is Challenged by a Player. She cannot declare a Challenge herself and then lower the TN.

The Giver may assign Power Themes to creatures or even places and call those Power Themes up to create effects much like the Players. However, it costs the Giver a Fortune Point each time she calls up a Power Theme (more on Power Themes below).

REGAINING FORTUNE POINTS AS A PLAYER

In order to regain Fortune Points as a Player, you must call up a Theme as a hindrance to your character, either in a Challenge or more generally in the story. Doing so refreshes your Fortune Points back up to 13. However, the more Fortune Points you regain, the more severe the hindrance must be, subject to the judgement of the Giver and the other Players. There is no hard and fast rule about this, but a character with 9 out of 13 Fortune Points can refresh with far less difficulty than a character with no Fortune Points left (who must refresh all 13).

If you end up with a Night Roll, you immediately regain any Fortune Points you spent on the Challenge. Essentially, you only have to pay if you get at least some narrative control from the Challenge.

In addition, if the Giver spent any Fortune Points increasing the TN, you gain Fortune Points equal to those the Giver spent if you end up with a Night Roll.

REGAINING FORTUNE POINTS AS THE GIVER

If you are the Giver and a Player ends up with a Dawn Roll, your store of Fortune Points is always refreshed up to its starting value (2 x the number of Players).

If you are the Giver and you run out of Fortune Points, you can refresh them back up to the starting value by either backing down from a Challenge without opposing (essentially the Players can Challenge you and automatically win) or by awarding one or more Players a magical item or power.

NARRATING

There are almost no limitations on what the Players or Giver may choose to narrate. Each group will naturally form its own standards for what you can and cannot describe. But there are a few broad rules that everyone must follow:

- You must follow Conditions.
- You may not contradict anything that has already been established in the story.
- Your narration must be sufficiently plausible and/or interesting, as judged by the rest of the group.
- You cannot take control of someone else's Player Character. You can narrate certain outcomes that involve their character (for instance, if you are fighting them you can narrate that they lose the fight), but you cannot put words in their mouth or force them to do anything that the controlling Player feels is inappropriate for the character.
- You cannot narrate the death of any character except your own. If you are the Giver, you cannot narrate the death of any Player's character.

CONDITIONS

Conditions are requirements or limitations that the narrator of a Challenge must incorporate or abide by. They occur during Noon or Dusk rolls. They represent the one idea that is most important to you in the Challenge, the one thing you want to make sure happens or doesn't happen.

For example, say a Player character decides to attack an enemy Warrior. The Giver Challenges, and the Player throws a Noon roll--Player narrates with a Condition set by the Giver. The Giver says 'You cannot kill the enemy Warrior.' The Player may then narrate whatever outcome she wishes, so long as she abides by the Condition. She may wound the enemy Warrior, scare him away, capture him, or even narrate that her own character gets killed by the enemy Warrior. But she cannot narrate the death of the enemy Warrior in that particular Challenge.





Like narration, there are few hard and fast rules about what Conditions are acceptable. Different groups will settle on different standards for what kinds of Conditions are acceptable, but there are some that govern everyone:

- You may not contradict something that has already been established in the story.
- You may not completely negate the narrator's intention. For example, if someone says they attack an enemy, you cannot set a Condition like "You may not harm or affect the enemy in any way" because that would completely negate the narrator's contribution. Conditions are supposed to add to narration, not block it.
- Your Condition must be fair, as judged by the rest of the group.

TRUTH THROUGH STORYTELLING

You build your stories and the specifics of the world in which they take place as you go. The basic information about the setting in the previous chapters is established from the beginning of the game, but there are a lot of details left for you to fill in.

One of the unique things about New Fire is that anybody can fill in these details. Players as well as the Giver can describe things the characters have seen, repeat rumors they have heard, and invent knowledge completely on their own.

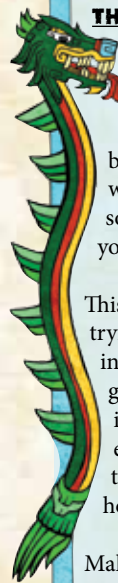
At no point do you ask "What has my character heard about the Cave of Eternal Hunger?" You simply decide what your character has heard, and describe that to the group. That description then becomes part of the setting for your game. If somebody disagrees with that description, they can Challenge. But otherwise, anybody can add to the setting.

If you are a Warrior, you know the history of wars you fought in and what the code of honor dictates. If you are a Priest, you know what rituals the gods demand and can recognize and interpret omens. You are the authority on spiritual matters. If you are a Nawal Sorcerer, you see into peoples' inner natures and know how the spirits feel about things. The expertise of your character gives you, the Player, the authority to invent the parts of the world your character knows about.

Once you successfully establish something in the story, it becomes part of the world and everyone else must honor it. If you establish that serpents made of fire inhabit the Canyon of Blood, then the Giver and other Players must factor that into their contributions. They can also play off of the idea and take it in other directions. Somebody may say that the fire serpents flow out of the Canyon and bathe the surrounding land in flame whenever the Fire Spindle constellation aligns with the Ring of Light. Then somebody else may say that one of the local villages has forged a deal with the serpents whereby they provide 100 trees each Dry Season for the serpents to burn in place of their homes.

You cannot arbitrarily change something that has been established. For example, if the fire serpents have been established, you cannot change them to cloud bears. It is both a constraint on your narration and a tool you can use. However, until something has been definitely established, it is open to invention--cloud bears may also inhabit the Canyon of Blood along with the fire serpents!

On the other hand, Semanawak is a very dynamic place, and things that you have establish can change over time. For example, the fire serpents in the Canyon of Blood may be driven out by the cloud bears. But they must change within the game world, to the satisfaction of everyone playing the game. They cannot simply be reinvented.



THE FLOWERY DEATH

The Giver can never kill a player character, not even if the Player throws a Night Roll, nor can one Player narrate the death of another Player's character, regardless of narrative control or Conditions. You can be bruised and battered and scarred for life, robbed of wealth and dignity, and wounded in body, mind, and soul. But the only one who can narrate the death of your character is You.

This rule is very important. New Fire is not a game about trying to avoid death. Dying the Flowery Death--dying in a meaningful and glorious way--is in fact the ultimate goal of the game. New Fire is a game about facing death in a world that requires death to renew itself. It is inevitable--your character will have to die eventually, or the game will end. But only you can choose when and how your character meets his or her end.

Make it a death to be proud of, one that people will remember for ages to come!



STATS AND THEMES

Stats and Themes determine how many dice you throw during Challenges. They also describe your character and aid you in determining who that character is.

STATS

Stats are the simpler of the two. They represent basic traits that every character possesses. Stats are divided up into three groups, each group based on one of the Three Souls that comprises a human being. Stats can have ranks 1 through 5. You may spend a Fortune Point to call up a Stat on a Challenge, and by doing so you will add a number of dice equal to that Stat's rank to your roll.

TEYOLIA

Your Teyolia is the Soul of Heart and physical ability. The Stats governed by Teyolia are:

- Force:** Strength and your willingness to use it.
- Agility:** Dexterity and grace.
- Endurance:** Ability to carry on despite pain and fatigue.

IHIYOTL

Your Ihiyotl is the Soul of Breath and social influence. The Stats governed by Ihiyotl are:

- Persuasion:** Charisma and your ability to sway the viewpoints of others.
- Deception:** Guile and your talent for making others believe something that is not true.
- Performance:** Stage presence and your ability to put on a show.

TONALLI

Your Tonalli is the Soul of Light and mind. The Stats governed by Tonalli are:

- Lore:** Knowledge of the world, whether through education or direct experience.
- Divination:** Insight into omens and the larger designs of the universe.
- Medicine:** Your understanding and power over the forces of life and death.

OTHER STATS

In addition to these main stats, there are a few others.

CRAFT

Every character has a craft stat that represents his or her ability to create things in the world. This stat does not belong to any one of the three Souls. It belongs to all three at the same time.

NAWAL STATS

Nawal Sorcerers have an additional group of stats known as Nawal Stats. Each Nawal Stat corresponds to one of the animal spirits the Nawal Sorcerer is bonded with. For example, a Nawal Sorcerer who has bonded with an Eagle spirit and a

Snake Spirit will have two Nawal Stats, one called Eagle and one called Snake.

These Nawal Stats apply to all situations involving that animal spirit.

THEMES

Themes are words or short phrases that represent things about a person, object, or situation that affect how the story unfolds. They connect the core elements of a scene to the way it is described, and allow the Giver and Players to interpret them. By spending a Fortune Point you can call up a Theme in order to add 3 dice to a roll.

The best way to explain Themes is with an example. Here is a scene that might occur in New Fire:

You look up to see the deranged Moon Priest Tlilpotonkwi leering down at you from atop the cliff. He is silhouetted against the Moon behind him, his spindly limbs looking like the branches of some creaking dead tree as he reaches upwards towards its sickly, pallid light. You know his plan--the Whispers of the night have convinced him that the Moon is really the Sun, and that all it needs to shine again is his help. And Ehekamitotiani's sacred conch shell trumpet, which he means to destroy as soon as he finishes the ritual!

There is a lot going on in this scene, and you could add many more creepy details to make it even more exciting--"Tlilpotonkwi is wearing a necklace made from severed human fingers, his teeth have taken on a pointed, bestial quality, and shadows around him seem to be roiling like a frenzied mob dancing to some insane music that only he can hear!" But details like these don't really change the situation. They just enhance it. The core elements of the scene, the things that truly affect how the situation unfolds, are these:

- Tlilpotonkwi is in a place that is hard for you to reach (he is high above you on a cliff).
- He is distracted (because he is concentrating on a complicated ritual).
- He has something that is extremely important to you (the conch shell trumpet).
- You don't have a lot of time before he finishes.

Each one of these core elements should be represented by a descriptively-named Theme--specifically, a situational Theme, or a Theme attached to the scene itself. The Giver should come up with a dramatic name for each one that reflects the situation--High Atop the Cliff, Lost in a Trance, All Hope is Within His Grasp, and Seize the Moment! Each one of these Themes can then be called up by either you or the Giver during a Challenge.

You could describe the situation differently, but the core elements would remain constant: "Tlilpotonkwi is on the far side





of a raging river! He has taken your young son hostage and is reciting a children's song, and you know that, once he finishes, he will use the knife he has hidden behind his back!" In this case the Giver would create different names for the Themes (Treacherous Currents, Charmed by Songs of Long Ago, Holds Your Heart in His Hands, and Just a Few More Lines!) to translate the core elements into the situation.

We described situational Themes in the above example, but anything in New Fire can have Themes attached to it. Each player character and non-player character has Themes that represent their essential dramatic qualities. Objects have Themes that represent their power and significance. We will provide examples of other Theme types below.

PERSONAL THEMES

Personal Themes are those that are attached to a character, either a player character or non-player character. These may be personality traits (Hot-headed, Serene, Head in the Clouds), past events that shape the character's present (Shivering in the Shadow of the Ancestors, Broken Heart, Freedom Means Nothing Left to Lose), reputation (Son of a Coward, Home-town Hero, Legendary Lover), or relationships (Friend in a High Place, Nemesis, Attentive Spirit). They may also be physical characteristics, both permanent and temporary (Tall As A Tree, Broken Arm, Beautiful Stormy Eyes).

Personal Themes should always be ideas that you intend to actively and repeatedly involve in the story. They should also be ideas that will contribute to gameplay. For example, Brooding is a perfectly fine character description, but it makes a poor personal Theme. Brooding is gloomy inaction, and therefore it would either remove a character from gameplay entirely (and deprive the Player of the chance to affect the story) or have no impact whatsoever (because gameplay is action and characters only act when they *stop* brooding!).

If you cannot come up with at least a few concrete ways in which you would use a personal Theme, you are probably better off thinking of another one.

OBJECT THEMES

Object Themes are those that are attached to the objects and equipment you acquire over the course of an adventure. They can represent physical, spiritual, sentimental, or any other sort of value, or the lack thereof. Here are some examples:

- A Makwawitl with Thirst for the Blood of the Gods (call this Theme up whenever you attack a creature with divine blood, such as the Tonalteka).
- A headdress with Voice of a Tlatoani (call this Theme up when you speak in order to command greater attention).
- A clay pot with Taste of Home in a Faraway Land (call up

this Theme to overcome sadness or xenophobia by reminding yourself of your loving home).

- A bow with Created By a Failure (call up this Theme whenever the bow's poor quality or bad reputation affects the story)

- A plant with Blur the Eyes, Clear the Head (call up this Theme to introduce hardship when trying to see the world and an asset when trying to grasp the truth that governs it).

Any object, no matter how humble, can have a Theme attached to it. Some objects may also have Power Themes attached (described further below).

SITUATIONAL THEMES

Situational Themes are those that are attached to or emerge from the situation. They may represent physical qualities (I Have the High Ground, Close Quarters, Dense Fog), social forces (They Are Watching, Slandorous Gossip, Lost in the Crowd), spiritual occurrences (The Earth is Hungry, War With the Beasts, Our Actions Echo Through Heaven), or any other situational factors (Eyes Peeled for Danger, Hope is Dead in Our Hearts, Drunk With Victory).

Situational Themes tend to be the most fluid Themes. They may be unique to the scene (Dense Cover, Dark and Stormy Night), or they may carry across multiple scenes (We Saw What You Did, Something is Stalking Us) or even an entire adventure (Abandoned by the Rain Goddess, The Stars Are Against Us). They can and should change to reflect the ebb and flow of the story.

The Giver should take the lead in tracking and announcing situational Themes--in fact, one of the Giver's most important responsibilities is to supply all scenes with situational Themes so the Players understand what is going on and have some pieces to play with. However, anybody can suggest situational Themes that seem appropriate. A Player may notice some element of the situation that has not yet been announced, create a dramatic-sounding Theme for it, and ask to use it on a Challenge. If the Giver and everyone else approve, it becomes a new situational Theme that anybody can call up.

USING THEMES

Let us return to our example--Tlilpotonkwi is high atop the cliff preparing to destroy the Conch Shell Trumpet of Eheka-mitotiani. The situational Themes in play are High Atop the Cliff, Lost in a Trance, All Hope is Within His Grasp, and Seize the Moment!

Suppose you say "Without any pause or hesitation, I seize the moment and shoot an arrow into his head!" The Giver decides to Challenge. The Giver spends a Fortune Point to Challenge, and then another to call up High Atop the Cliff in order to increase the TN you must hit, because the shot is particularly difficult.



You spend a Fortune Point to call up Seize the Moment, because you are acting so quickly and decisively in the scene. You throw three dice from calling up that Theme, but you are unable to hit the TN. You decide to spend another Fortune Point to call up All Hope is Within His Grasp to throw three additional dice, because you know that if Tlilpotonkwi destroys the conch shell, Ehekamitotiani the Wind God will never again bring rain to your city.

You are just barely able to hit the TN on three dice, which gives you a Dusk roll. The Giver will narrate the outcome, but you will get to set a condition. You declare that “Tlilpotonkwi may not destroy the conch shell before I get to him.” The Giver thinks for a moment, and then says “Your arrow shot is off target but manages to graze his arm. This causes him to shriek and drop the shell. Your heart leaps into your throat as you see it tumble off the cliff, only to come to rest safely on a branch halfway down.”

The scene then continues from there.

INTERPRETING THEMES

Themes are absolutely open to interpretation--that is the entire point! The best Themes are evocative but very general, and can be used both positively and negatively. In the above example, the Giver could have called up All hope is Within His Grasp to raise the TN, and justified it by saying that Tlilpotonkwi turns and dangles the shell over the edge as a threat--if you shoot, he will drop it, and therefore you cannot quite bring yourself to shoot! You could call up High Atop the Cliff yourself and say that, when your arrow shoots past him, it startles him and causes him to slip and fall off the cliff.

We encourage everyone to be imaginative and come up with new and unique ways to use and interpret Themes. Some of the best moments in New Fire come when someone finds an unexpected but perfectly plausible way to interpret and Theme and creates a true plot twist!

We also encourage interpretations that are less literal and more poetic--for example, if all Hope is in Tlilpotonkwi's Grasp, you might say that he cannot actually bring himself to destroy the conch shell, because it represents not just his hope and your hope, but also Hope itself. These interpretations are particularly interesting when an item or person has not been clearly established yet, because they add details to it and create things that can be referenced later in the story.

Ultimately, the goal of Themes is to give everyone “idea units” to play with and arrange in interesting ways. As long as an interpretation is plausible and fun enough to satisfy the group, then it is perfectly valid.

ADDING OR SUBTRACTING THEMES

Everything changes in Semanawak--situations, objects, and people. Therefore, it makes sense that the Themes representing

these things will also change. A change in a situation may cause new Themes to be introduced and old Themes to be retired. In the above example, when Tlilpotonkwi drops the conch shell, Seize the Moment and All Hope is Within His Grasp can probably be retired, because the moment was already seized and Tlilpotonkwi no longer holds the conch shell. It is now balanced on the branch. However, this might justify the addition of new Themes, like Hope Teeters on the Brink (both of you need the shell to succeed) and Mad Rush (you are struggling to be the first to reach it).

Wounds, fear and inspiration, breaking and repairing, and many other concepts change over time, and so Themes associated with these concepts should also change.

SELECTING THEMES

Themes both represent and create ideas in a scene, and by choosing which Themes to include you shape the scene. To put it another way, Themes are the blocks that build the scene. By choosing which shapes you include, you affect what people can and cannot build.

In the above scene involving Tlilpotonkwi, it is night time, so it is obviously dark. But darkness is not a core obstacle in the situation--Tlilpotonkwi is silhouetted against the Moon and clearly visible. He can see you even in the dim light because he is looking down at you from a high position, and he knows you have been chasing him. In this scene, the darkness just adds atmosphere and menace to the situation.

Other situations might have Darkness as a Theme. If you are sneaking into an enemy camp at night, Darkness is important--that is why you are sneaking in at night rather than day. If something is stalking you but hiding just outside the light of your campfire, Darkness is important--if it weren't dark, you would be able to see the stalker plainly. Both of these scenes would have some Darkness-related Theme to reflect the fact that Darkness is major component in the encounter. And you could easily add a Darkness-related Theme to the scene with Tlilpotonkwi. But doing so would fundamentally change the scene by including a new core element.

This is also true of Themes related to characters. You might describe your character as tall with straight hair, a deep voice, and sharp eyes that follow movement like an eagle watching its fleeing prey. Some of these might be Themes, and some might not. If you can change them without having a major affect on the character, they are not Themes. But if you choose to make them Themes, they become defining, story-changing traits of the character.





POWER THEMES

Power Themes are different than other Themes. They represent an extraordinary power or ability a character commands, which is usually magical in nature. The Power Theme Fire means the character has power over Fire--she can create it, extinguish it, move it, shape it, or do anything else that is thematically related to the idea of Fire. The Power Theme Leadership means the character can command and inspire others, or undermine others who try to do so. The basic rule is that a Power Theme allows you to create, command, enhance, inhibit, or destroy anything thematically related to the name of the Power Theme.

Unlike all other Themes, Power Themes do not require Fortune Points to activate. Instead, you earn their use by fulfilling certain story requirements. These requirements vary depending on the Profession of your character--Warriors must follow the philosophy of their Warrior House, Priests must allow the gods to possess them, and Nawal Sorcerers must give in to the instincts of their animal selves. But for all characters, the greater the difficulty or significance of the story requirement (that is, the harder it was for the character to earn), the greater the magnitude of the Power Theme (the greater the effect she can generate).

When you use a Power Theme you describe an effect you want to create that is thematically related to the Power Theme.

Regardless of any Challenge, it always work as you describe it--if you call up the Power Theme Fire and say that you create a large fireball, it creates a large fireball.

You may still be Challenged on the exact outcome of that power (who if anyone gets killed or scorched by the fireball, what gets destroyed, and so forth), but the effect you describe always happens. Sometimes the effect is instantaneous (a person is instantly consumed by fire). Other times it is longer lasting, and may create additional Themes that others can call upon (you ignite your weapon and use it to attack your enemies, which grants it the object Theme Blazing Touch).

Power Themes usually have direct results upon the world and the story. But if they are used or involved in a roll, Power Themes grant 5 dice towards that roll.



POWER THEME LIMITS

The limits of Power Themes are up to each groups to decide. We have not given Power Themes official ranges, durations, areas of effect, or the like, because the important part is how it affects the story. Whether an enemy is blown apart in a fiery explosion, smote by a bolt of lightning, or crushed under a rocky avalanche, the effect is that he is dead, and that's what is important. Power Themes have few rules to exploit or manipulate, because the only major rule is what seems fair.

DESTINIES

In addition to Stats and Themes, player characters also have goals known as Destinies. Destinies represent concrete objectives that the character is working towards. These can be short term goals (I will capture and sacrifice a great Kakayawani Warrior in this Battle) or they can be very long term (I will become the Tlatoani of Popokatetlan). They can be goals that the character is aware of (I will gain vengeance against the Xochiteka) or they can be fate-like ends that only the Player is aware of (Destined to kill your own father). Each one is a story thread that may be as long or as short as the Player desires.

Characters must have at least one Destiny at all times, and they may have as many as three at once.

Destinies have several purposes in New Fire. First off, they give Players a direction to work towards in their narration, which decreases the analysis paralysis created by truly infinite possibility. Second, they indicate the interests of the Players to the Giver, which helps the Giver understand the goals of the Players.

But the third reason is perhaps the most concrete: Destinies allow Players to advance their characters over time.

As characters pursue them, Destinies build up Day Energy (the experience points of New Fire). Each Destiny gains an additional point of Day Energy whenever the character makes meaningful progress towards it. If you have multiple Destinies and make progress towards several of them in the same session, they each gets a point of Day Energy. Each Destiny acquires its own pool of Day Energy, which Players must track over time. In other words, the more actively you pursue a Destiny, the more it is "worth." However, each Destiny can only gain one point of Day Energy per game session.

Until a Destiny is fulfilled, the Day Energy it contains has no effect. It simply builds up. But once you complete the Destiny, either by succeeding or irreversibly failing, the Day Energy is released. You can then use it to improve your character (the details of how to do this are explained in the Character Creation section).

Success is not required to fulfill a Destiny. Some of the most dramatic Destinies end with the character failing to achieve something. The important part is that the story thread the Destiny represents has come to a satisfying conclusion. But because you only get Day Energy when a Destiny is complete, you should select Destinies that have definite ending conditions. A Destiny like "Protect the Weak" will never be fulfilled, because there will always be weak people to protect in the world. A better choice would be "Protect the Village from the Tzatzini Warlord," because there is a definite conclusion to it--you either stop the Warlord, or he destroys the village.

You may freely abandon a Destiny if you like. You may also adopt new Destinies whenever you want. In either case you simply announce it to the group. However, any Day Energy on an abandoned Destiny is lost. The completion of a Destiny should be self-evident, but if there is any doubt it is up to the Giver and the other Players to approve it.



CHARACTER CREATION

Players in New Fire must create characters in order to play. These characters serve as the Player's influence upon the story. The Player is the ultimate authority on her character, and may veto any narration she feels betrays the character's concept. But Players are not the same as their characters. Players know things their characters do not know, and they should make decisions for the character based not on what the character would want, but what they, the Player, would find most interesting and satisfying. You don't necessarily play as your character. Rather, your character represents your part of the story.

THE FIVE SUNS OF CHARACTER CREATION

Just as Semanawak was ruled over by Five Suns, so too are characters created in five stages: Origins, Stats, Themes, Profession, and Destinies. All of these stages are necessary, but you may perform them in whatever order makes sense to you.

ORIGINS

Origins will probably be either the longest or the shortest stage. It is essentially a brainstorming session during which you dream up as many details about your character as you can. There are countless questions that you can ask and answer for your character, but here are a few that may help you shake some ideas loose:

- How old are you?
- What is your family like? Parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles, aunts, cousins, and other extended relatives are all very important in Semanawak. Try to come up with at least one memory your character has for each of these relatives. And try to imagine something they would each say about your character.
- Where do you live now? Do you have your own house, do you still live with your family, or do you have some other living situation?
- Are you married? If so, do you have children? Remember that most kalpultin will only let you start your own household if you are married, and the size of a household directly relates to its influence in the community.
- What is your social class? Were you born into your current class, or did you rise/fall into it?
- Did you attend the Telpochkali (common school) or the Kalmekak (elite university)? What memories do you have from school? Are you still close with any of your teachers or fellow students?
- What sort of trouble have you gotten into? Everybody makes mistakes, but some are more severe than others. Have you committed any crimes? Have you offended or harmed anybody with your actions? And if so, have you ever been caught?

CHARACTER CREATION AT A GLANCE

- Origins:** Name, Kalpuli, Social Status, and as many other details as you can think of.
- Stats:** All ten standard Stats start at rank 1 (Nawal Sorcerer's get one Nawal Stat of their choice, which starts at rank 3). You then get 20 Day Energy points to improve these stats. You increase a Stat one rank at a time, and each increase costs a number of Day Energy points equal to the rank you are buying up to.
- Profession:** Warrior, Priest, or Nawal Sorcerer. Once you decide between these, select which Warrior House or Priestly Order or Nawal Spirit you are affiliated with.
- Themes:** Choose ten personal Themes for your character.
- Destinies:** Choose one to three Destinies for your character. You must share at least one Destiny with the other characters in your group.



- What do you want out of life, and how does this compare to what you currently have?
- What are some things that happened to you growing up, and how have they affected you as an adult?
- What are your primary duties, and how do you feel about them?
- Who is your best friend and your worst enemy?
- Who is the person you most admire?
- What is your reputation in Semanawak? How do people greet you, and what springs to mind when they hear your name? And if you died today, what would people remember you for?
- Are you guided by destiny, or do you struggle against it?
- Which obligations do you feel strongly about, and which ones do you simply go through the motions on? Who or what are you loyal to?
- How do you feel about your ancestors and those who came before you? What is your connection to the past?
- If you could give your character some advice, what would it be?

You may choose to write an entire detailed backstory, or you may instead simply put together a basic concept and fill in the details as you go. Things you come up with during Origins will





likely show up again in the later stages as Themes, Stat choices, or Destinies. You are free to come up with as much or as little as you like.

However, at the very least you will need to select your character's name, the Kalpuli he/she comes from, and his/her social class.

STATS

All ten standard character Stats begin at rank 1. If you are playing a character with the Nawal Sorcerer Profession, you also start with one Nawal Stat, which begins at rank 3. You may then spend 20 points of Day Energy to improve your Stats.

- **Teyolia (physical) Stats:** Force, Agility, Endurance
- **Ihiyotl (social) Stats:** Persuasion, Deception, Perform
- **Tonalli (mental/spiritual) Stats:** Lore, Divination, Medicine
- **Other:** Craft, Nawal Stats (only available to Nawal Sorcerers)

In order to increase a Stat, you must spend a number of Day Energy points equal to the next rank. For example, in order to go from rank 1 to rank 2, you must spend 2 points of Day Energy.



You may only increase a Stat one rank at a time, so in order to go from rank 1 to rank 3 you would have to spend a total of 5 points--2 to go from rank 1 to rank 2, plus 3 to go from rank 2 to rank 3, for a total of 5 points of Day Energy. Rank 5 is the maximum rank of any Stat.

Nawal Sorcerers may buy additional Nawal Stats for 1 point of Day Energy, and then increase them as usual.

THEMES

You may select up to ten personal Themes at character creation. These Themes may be whatever you choose, but we have created a checklist based on the mythic history of Semanawak and on the stages of life a character goes through in order to help you come up with a diverse, well-rounded set of Themes. Each step on this list represents a different element that contributes to your character. You should create a Theme for each of these elements.

Themes should be specific but flexible. A Theme like Great Warrior is very poor, because there are few rolls it *couldn't* be called up on. The Giver should not allow such broad Themes. However, a Theme like Gifted Housebuilder is so specific it is almost never going to be applicable. You will want to land somewhere between these two extremes. The best Themes can be interpreted in several different ways, and reveal something new about your character each time you call them up.

If you wrote anything down during the Origins stage of char-

acter creation, you can often create Themes simply by lifting important or dramatic-sounding phrases from that written description. Character quotes can also make very good Themes--imagine something cool your character might say about one of the Origin questions or one of the elements below, and turn that quote into a Theme.

Remember that Themes are only useful if they can be incorporated into the story! A Theme you never call up is a waste of space on your character sheet. Themes represent the dynamic, dramatic elements of your character that drive the story. If you have an idea that is important but will not significantly affect the story, make it a simple description, not a Theme.

Also remember that you will probably want at least a couple Themes that can be called up as hardships in order to regain Fortune Points. Most good Themes are flexible enough that they can be both positive and negative depending on the circumstances. But you will need at least something for your character to struggle against if you want to refresh your narrative pool.

Red Sun: Passion. This Theme represents something your character loses his or her composure over. It may be a hatred of injustice or some noble ambition, or it may be a lust or compulsion that you cannot help but give in to. But this is something you cannot remain neutral about.

Green Sun: Equipment. This Theme represents something physical that your character owns or has access to that is of great significance. It may be an item you can carry with you, or it may be a house or some piece of property. It may have magical powers, exceptionally good or poor craftsmanship, great sentimental value, or other unique qualities. But whatever it is, it is very important to you for some reason.

Blue Sun: Source of Strength. This Theme represents the thing that gives your character the will to carry on. It is the spring from which your river flows. When things are at their bleakest, this is the thing that makes you press on. It may be a person, a place, or an idea. It may be inspiration, love, fear, or vengeance. It may be noble or shameful. But without it, you would have fallen long ago.

White Sun: Reputation and Demeanor. This Theme represents the way others perceive your character. It is impression others get when meeting you. They might remember some great or terrible thing you did in the past, or that your family did in the past. They might be impressed by your manners or beauty, repulsed by your crudeness and ugly face, put at ease by your inviting smile, or highly suspicious of your shifty eyes. Whatever the case, this is others see you.

Gold Sun: Community. This Theme represents the effect your community has had on you. Everybody comes from a kalpuli in a village, town, or city, and you cannot help but carry that origin with you. You may draw strength from



your home, or you may be haunted by it. You may wear your identity proudly, or you may hide it. But for better or worse, this is the soil you grew from.

Birth: Horoscope. Everybody in the Valley is named according to the Tonalpowali, the sacred horoscope calendar. Each of its 260 days bestows a distinct fortune upon those named on that day. The stars and other omens can also influence this fortune. This Theme represents the effect that fate has upon your character. It is the nature you were born with. But whether you embrace that nature or defy it is up to you.

Childhood: Background. This Theme represents the effect your past has upon your character. Your family, your upbringing, the expectations you grew up with, traumas or triumphs, and other formative events of your life--all of these things can be represented in your Background Theme.

School: Exceptional Ability. This Theme represents something that your character is uniquely good or uniquely bad at. Your Stats represent general ability, but this Theme defines some specific skill, talent, or lack thereof--keen eyesight, a gift for growing things, a tendency to drop everything, a complete inability to shoot a bow, and so on.

Day: Core Character Concept. This Theme sums up your character in a single, concise sentence. People are complex creatures, and nobody can be completely explained by a sentence. But characters in a story can, because characters are not people. They are ideas. They are concepts. And this Theme should be the statement of that concept.

Night: Disadvantage. This Theme represents the thing or things your character struggles with in life. It could be something you fear, something you cannot do but wish you could, something that happened to you and left you hurt and scarred, or even something you learned and cannot unlearn. Everybody has a shadow that stalks them through life. This Theme represents the thing that stalks you.

These elements are just suggestions. You are free to deviate from this list and pick whatever you think will be most interesting--perhaps your character has multiple Exceptional Abilities, or several Passions. But you should not have multiple Themes that cover the same idea. Each Theme should represent a different facet of the character.

PROFESSION

While any Profession in New Fire can be rewarding to play, we have paid special attention to the three most dramatic Professions: Warrior, Priest, and Nawal Sorcerer. Each Profession has a unique role in Semanawak and also grants characters access to Power Themes, which they can use to create extraordinary and magical effects in the story. But the Power Themes you get, and the way you earn the ability to use them, differ between the Professions.

WARRIORS AND WARRIOR HOUSES

In the old days, Warriors were simply men who were stronger and crueller than anyone else. They used their power to take what they wanted and left everyone else to languish in fear and misery. But over time the greatest of them realized, through spiritual vision, that warfare could serve a greater purpose. These ancient Warlords each created philosophies based on their visions to guide those who followed them and help them harness their fury and aggression, and for this they are worshipped as ancestor-gods today. Their enlightened followers went on to become the martial fraternities known as Warrior Houses.

PATHS TO GLORY

Each Warrior House has three Paths to Glory--one Combat Path, one non-Combat Path, and one Social Path. These paths represent the ideals established by the founder and guide Warriors towards their proper purpose. The sacred power of these paths manifests in the form of Power Themes. Each House also has three Power Themes that it grants to its members. These Power Themes represent the divine truth that was discovered and established by the founders.

By following these Paths, a Warrior follows in the footsteps of his House's founder and thereby gains a small portion of the founder's power and insight. Through emulation, the Warrior achieves oneness with the founder god.

Each time you Follow a Path and complete a deed based on its sacred mandate, you gain one point of Teotl (spiritual truth). You may spend this to call up any of your House's three Power Themes to create an effect. You may store up Teotl by completing multiple paths, but you may never hold more than 5 points of Teotl at a time. As with all Power Themes, the strength of the effect depends on the difficulty or significance of what you had to do to earn it.

In addition, each time you fulfill all three of your House's Paths, you gain the ability to assume the form of your House's ancestor-deity for a single scene. This gives you access to all three Power Themes at once, as well as some additional powers. However, you may only do this once per game session. And you may not "save up" multiple uses of this power--once you have completed all three Paths you gain one transformation, and until you use it you will never earn another one.

You may only fulfill one Path at a time. No single deed can satisfy multiple paths at once. If you manage to complete a deed that could fulfill more than one of your Houses's Paths, you must choose a single Path to apply it to.





JAGUAR WARRIORS

"The greatness of a Warrior comes from the greatness of his deeds."

Founded by the great Warrior-god Chalchiwiztli (Jade Child), the Jaguar Warriors follow a code of unseen, unsung service to the Empire. They perform glorious deeds, but choose to hide these deeds in the shadows. They are masters of stealth and serve as the scouts and special operatives of the Empire.

The Hunt of Shadows (Non-Combat Path)

You must steal something from an enemy, without the enemy knowing it, and bring it back to your companions. But you may not claim credit for it. If you steal an enemy general's makwawitl, you must drop it in the center of your camp while nobody is looking and return to your tent. Others will marvel at the deed and wonder who could have done such an amazing thing. But you must never let them know it was you.

The thing you steal is usually an object, but it is just as valuable to steal information or some other non-material thing.

Touch of the Fangs (Combat Path)

You must sneak up on an enemy undetected and touch him with your hand. You must let him know you are there and could have killed him. You may then proceed to fight him, but only after touching him and revealing your presence. Essentially, you must successfully ambush an enemy and then voluntarily forgo the advantage of that ambush.

Care for the Cubs (Social Path)

You must perform a significant service for another without them knowing it was you. You may leave them food or protect them or do anything else to help, but they must never see you or know that you helped them. This service must be deliberate--accidentally helping someone does not qualify. And it must be specific--you must consciously choose who you are helping. You can help individuals or small groups, but helping an entire kalpuli or altepetl is not specific enough.

Power Themes of the Jaguar Warriors

- Darkness: manipulate darkness and shadows to your advantage in whatever ways you can think of. You can intensify or shape them to conceal something, push them away to reveal something hidden by them, or even give yourself Jaguar Eyes that can see through any darkness as though it wasn't even there.

- Destruction: damage or destroy something in the world. It is most commonly used to physically destroy physical things--an enemy's weapon, a building, and so on--but you are free to explore other interpretations of Destruction as well--destroying a relationship, a career, and so on.

- Deception: make people believe something false. You cannot force belief in something observably wrong, like "the blue sky you see is really orange." The Power Theme is Deception, not

Hallucination. But otherwise you can make someone believe or at least strongly suspect anything, no matter how improbable--for instance, you could make someone in a deep cave believe that, since they ventured underground, the sky has changed from blue to orange.

Chalchiwiztli the Jaguar King

If you have Followed all three Paths you may assume the form of Chalchiwiztli himself, bringing him to life again and gaining his powers. His spirit inhabits you for a single glorious Scene.

You gain tremendous power in this form. You may run, climb, and move as if you were a jaguar, scaling walls without effort and moving much faster than an ordinary human. You may see in the dark, track prey by scent, and hear exceptionally well. You may also call up Power Themes Darkness, Destruction, and Deception freely during the Scene.

Unlike the god forms of the other Warrior Houses, Chalchiwiztli's presence is not always obvious. The Jaguar Lord is crafty, subtle, and modest, and is content to act through the shadows. You may choose to display the god's form in all its glory, but you may also use it secretly and preserve your normal appearance.

EAGLE WARRIORS

"The greatness of a Warrior comes from the greatness of those he leads."

Founded by the great Warrior-god Mischlakwikwik (Cloud Sculptor), the Eagle Warriors follow a code of inspiration and leadership by example. They do great things to show others that great things can indeed be done. They are the leaders of the armies and serve as commanders, daredevils, and standard bearers.

Leap of the Sky (Non-combat Path)

You must perform a great athletic feat where the price of failure is death or serious injury--climbing a treacherous cliff face, diving from a ledge down into the sea below, dancing atop a mountain in the middle of a storm, and so forth. This feat must be witnessed by others so they may benefit from your fine example.

The Eagle Dance (Combat Path)

You must dance before the enemy. You must not strike, nor show any fear that he might strike you. If you finish the dance without being hit, you have succeeded in blinding the enemy with your glory! You may then fight him as normal, but the longer you dance without being hit or fighting back, the more glory you earn.

The Dream of Flight (Social Path)

You must inspire someone to accomplish something significant in their life. It must be remarkable for the person accomplishing it--inspiring a Warrior to fight is not remarkable, but inspiring a timid Farmer to do so could be. It must also be



them who accomplish it, not you. This Path is about inspiring others to do great things, not doing great things for them.

Power Themes of the Eagle Warriors

- Vision: extraordinary sight and awareness. You may spot impossibly subtle details. You may see things at impossible distances. And you may gain mystic insight into things out of sight, seeing them in the wind and the clouds. You may choose to narrate whatever your Vision sees yourself, or you may use it to ask the Giver to tell you when some large important event takes place beyond your sight.

- Movement: the ability to move in extraordinary ways. You may run impossibly fast, jump impossibly high, change direction in mid-air, survive deadly falls, and generally move however you want to get to wherever you want.

- Leadership: the ability to command others. When you speak, others instinctively recognize your authority and obey, even if they would normally be considered your superiors. This does not turn them into mindless automatons--enemy soldiers will not suddenly drop their weapons and start dancing, for instance. But if you tell them to stop fighting so you can speak, they will obey. If you demand a duel with their leader, they will comply. If you order them to withdraw from battle and can give even a vaguely plausible reason why, they will probably obey. However, Tlatoanis and Gods are immune or at least resistant to Leadership. Their authority is simply too powerful and too absolute to be swayed in this way.

Mishtlakwkwik the Lord of Eagles

If you have Followed all three Paths you may assume the form of Mishtlakwkwik himself, bringing him to life again and gaining his powers. His spirit inhabits you for a single glorious Scene.

You gain tremendous power in this form. Your costume sprouts wings and lets you fly like an eagle, soaring through the skies and diving like a heavenly arrow. You gain powerful talons, a voice that carries across the entire Valley, and the amazingly sharp eyes of an eagle. You may also freely call up the Power Themes Vision, Movement, and Leadership during the Scene.

SCREAMING ONES

"The greatness of a Warrior comes from the greatness of his opponents."

Founded by the great Warrior-god Chiltikizwatl (Red Leaf), the Screaming Ones follow a code of courage and strength through constant struggle. Glory and growth come from facing adversity--only by facing things greater than yourself can you yourself become great. Screaming Ones are the shock troops of the armies, the ones who charge the strongest enemy formations and break their lines.

Strength of the Fallen (Non-combat Path)

You must remember the worthy dead and make offerings to

those you have defeated and those who have defeated you. You must pay respect to those who have made you stronger. This may take many forms--telling great stories in their honor, offering them food or items or even blood, performing rituals to celebrate their memory, making peace with their grieving relatives, and so on. All true Screaming Ones love their enemies like brothers, and hold them in awe and reverence.

Fear is Like a Fire (Combat Path)

You must face an obviously stronger opponent. You must face an opponent you fear. The standoff must be on relatively equal terms, and you must struggle meaningfully against him. Only by seeking out great opponents can you yourself be great. Only by feeling and then facing fear can you know that you are growing.

The Bravery of the Weak (Social Path)

You must perform a great service for a child, an elder, or someone else who has difficulty facing the trials and hardships of the world. This service must be offered free of charge and for no benefit other than Following this Path.

Power Themes of the Screaming Ones

- Strength: the ability to perform unbelievable feats of strength. You may lift boulders, hold back entire squads of men, smash through walls, and other such acts of superhuman power. You call upon the strength of those you defeated and remind yourself of the strength you already possess that allowed you to defeat them. You may also use Strength to awaken the strength in others, or to drain it away from them.

- Fire: the ability to create and control flames. They are a tool in your hands and will follow your commands. As Chiltikizwatl said, "Fear is like a fire--it will destroy you if you fall into its grasp, but if you control it you wield the greatest power known to man."

- Fear: the ability to control fear itself, increasing it or taking it away as you see fit. You may fill your enemies with panic, drain away an ally's terror, or transfer someone's existing fear from one source to another.

Chiltikizwatl the Screaming One

If you have Followed all three Paths you may assume the form of Chiltikizwatl himself, bringing him to life again and gaining his powers. His spirit inhabits you for a single glorious Scene.

While in this form you become a creature of living flame. Fiery plumes burst forth in place of hair and feathers, igniting anything that comes too close. Your skin becomes stone, like the slopes of a volcano containing the boiling magma. You speak with the voices of all the worthy opponents you have defeated, and you strike with the might of armies. You may also freely call up the Power Themes Strength, Fire, and Fear during the Scene.





SHORN ONES

"The greatness of a Warrior comes from the greatness of what he fights for."

Founded by the great Warrior-god Waywetzkaiwitl (Laughing Feather), the Shorn Ones follow a code of stoicism, endurance, and determination despite all hardship. Anybody can be strong for a moment. The Shorn Ones follow the way of the Farmer, who is strong all day, every day. Shorn Ones are the defenders on the battlefield, the ones who hold ground and never fall back.

Wounds of the Earth (Non-combat Path)

You must suffer the pain and hardship of your wounds, bearing them without complaint. More precisely, you must voluntarily call up a Wound-related Theme as a hardship without gaining any Fortune Points from it (normally calling up a Theme as a hardship restores your Fortune Points). Only through suffering can you find your true strength.

Dance of the Immortal River (Combat Path)

You must perform a war dance while fighting an enemy and allow yourself to be wounded before retaliating. You may evade obviously lethal attacks, but you must not attack until the enemy draws blood and inflicts a Wound. The ground a Shorn One defends is sacred because it is covered in his blood. And a true Shorn One only fights on sacred ground.

The Last Seed (Social Path)

You must perform a great service for a farmer involving physical labor and hardship. This service must be offered for free and for no benefit other than Following this Path. Farmers are the ones who taught the first Shorn Ones the true meaning of strength and greatness. Just as humans owe a debt to the gods for giving them life, so too do the Shorn Ones owe a debt to the farmers who give their lives meaning.

Power Themes of the Shorn Ones

- Pain: inflict or remove pain on yourself and others. You may wrack an enemy with agony, halting him and rendering him helpless, or you may wash it away from an ally, stopping his cries and letting him ignore his injuries.
- Fatigue: endure exhaustion and hardship or inflict them on others. You may run for hours at a time, go without sleep, or reduce an enemy to a gasping, barely-conscious wreck. You may restore an ally to wakefulness and vigor, or cause an already tired enemy to fall asleep.
- Serenity: remain calm despite any provocation and cool the raging emotions of others, no matter how violently they churn. Anger, frustration, lust, and any such feelings melt away, replaced with a neutral and contemplative calm. Alternatively, you may melt away your enemy's composure and force him to succumb to his anger and rashness.

Waywetzkaiwitl the Maize Blooded

If you have Followed all three Paths you may assume the form of Waywetzkaiwitl himself, bringing him to life again and gaining his powers. His spirit inhabits you for a single glorious Scene.

While in this form you become a boundless spring of blood and determination. Your hair becomes like maize silk and your skin turns a vibrant gold color, infusing you with the vigor of a thousand seasons. Your eyes become clear and relentless like waves crashing against a cliff face and carving it away. Your skin can be cut, but your veins never run dry and your Will never breaks. Your feet root into the ground like an oak tree. There is no pain you cannot endure, and no opponent who can drive you even a single step back. You may also freely call up the Power Themes Pain, Fatigue, and Serenity during the Scene.

PRIESTS AND PRIESTLY ORDERS

Priests are those who have the rare ability to mediate between mortals and gods. They open themselves up to the gods, invite them into their bodies, and release their divine powers on Earth. They also deliver the offerings of mortals to the gods. They are the bridges between mortals and the Beyond.

Any Priest can summon any god, so long as she has spiritual contact through a Sacred Bundle, Idol, or divinely ordained location. But the gods of Semanawak can be very temperamental. They are powerful, conscious forces of nature, like rivers or jaguars or mountains, and if you don't understand them you place yourself and others at great risk. For this reason, Priests join Orders that "specialize" in dealing with a small section of the full pantheon.

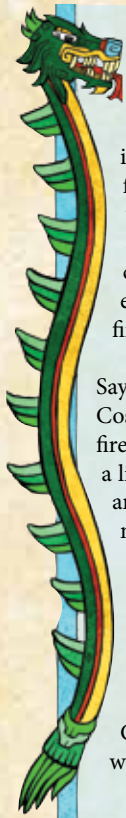
PRIESTLY MAGIC

In order to call upon a god, a Priest must have an Idol (a bulky, sanctified statue of a god usually kept at the god's temple), a Sacred Bundle (a portable package of relics connected to a god), or a divinely ordained place (a god's temple or important landmark). These objects/locations create a spiritual link and allow the Priest to take the spirit of the god into herself. In effect, the Priest becomes a mortal form of the god on Earth.

During this transformation the Priest is able to use the god's powers, access its knowledge, and communicate with and as the god. But she is not fully in control. She can shape the god's will, but it is more accurate to say that she unleashes the god rather than controls it, and even the most benevolent deity can be dangerous. In Semanawak no god is wholly good or wholly evil. They are what they are, and being a Priest is all about emphasizing the positives while minimizing the negatives.

Each god has three Power Themes that represent its influence, which Priests may use to perform magic. When a Priest summons a god, she selects one of its three Power Themes and narrates a magical Effect based on that Power Theme. She then selects another one of the god's Power Themes and narrates





EXAMPLES OF PRIESTLY MAGIC

The god Oleletl has the Power Themes Fire, Weapons, and Pain. Say the Priest picks Fire as her Effect and Pain as the Cost. She narrates that a fireball explodes in the middle of an enemy formation, but as it does she feels the blood burning in her veins, wracking her with terrible pain as the enemy soldiers burn. This gives her a personal Theme called Burning Blood, which may be called up for the rest of the scene by the Giver or anyone else who wishes to oppose her. The more powerful the fireball, the longer this personal Theme endures.

Say she instead chooses Pain as the Effect and Fire as the Cost. In this case she might narrate that, after she builds a fire, she may plunge her hand into it and transfer the pain to a line of enemy archers, causing them to fall to the ground and writhe in agony. The size of the fire she builds determines the magnitude of pain. Alternatively, she might choose to narrate that her hand is burned to a withered crisp by the fire--such a permanent Cost would allow her to create a truly massive Effect, like bringing an entire army to its knees!

If she chooses Weapons as the Effect and Pain as the Cost, she could narrate that any weapon that strikes and wounds her will be turned to ash.

a Cost for that Effect. This Cost represents the undesirable power of the god that rushes out along with the power the Priest desires. It is the harmful side effect of opening yourself up to the god.

The Cost may be something that must be sacrificed in order to create the Effect. It may be a negative side effect that coincides with the magic. It may also be an action that the Priest is compelled to take by the spirit of the god within her. It may create other situational or personal Themes. Regardless, the Cost must be something that negatively impacts the Priest and the things the Priest cares about.

You cannot inflict a Cost on others unless they volunteer or unless their suffering makes the Priest suffer. You cannot use the Cost to gain an additional benefit. Also, the Cost must be paid before the Effect occurs, or at the same time. You cannot create an Effect and pay the Cost later. However, you *can* pay the Cost well ahead of the Effect. This allows you to create "spells" in advance that you can then call upon in a time of need.

Many Priests spend a great deal of time and effort suffering through difficult Costs in order to earn the right to create powerful Effects in the future. In this way, Priests may earn points of Teotl like Warriors, and use them to activate Power Themes they earned. However, they earn Teotl for each god individually--fulfilling one god's Cost does not allow them to call the Power Theme of a different god. Like Warriors, they are limited to 5 points of Teotl.

Any combination and interpretation is possible, and so long as your idea is judged acceptable by the Giver and the other Players, feel free to use your imagination to its fullest!

One important tip: it can be tricky at first to come up with good Costs for some of the Power Themes--for example, how do you make a Power Theme like Fertility into a Cost? Simply remember that gods can give, and they can also take away.

Making Fertility into a Cost could involve you demonstrating your fertility (having a child would be a very significant Cost, and justify a rather large Effect!). Or it could involve you losing it, or taking it away from someone else (who you care about), or even taking it away from a section of land (and incurring the wrath of those who rely on that land).

A Cost involving Words might require you to speak, or it might deprive you of your ability to speak for a time. A Cost involving Beauty might require you to demonstrate your beauty, or it might cause you to lose your beauty, or take away someone else's (but only if this is highly difficult or negatively impacts you in some way).

Carrying the Gods

Each Order worships many gods, but they all have five gods that they honor above all others--one for each of the five directions. These gods are the most powerful and popular in their altepetls, and grant their Priests the greatest powers. These are the gods who allow Priests to work their most dramatic magic.

Priests can call upon their gods freely while in their Sacred Precincts, but when they travel they must literally carry their gods with them if they want to summon them. Each Order has a number of Sacred Bundles, which it grants to its members when they leave their Sacred Precinct. These Bundles are extremely valuable and very difficult to make, and the Orders do not have very many of them--at most four or five for each god. Player characters can generally get whichever Bundles they want from their Order, so long as they take good care of them. But negligence may make this more difficult.

Not all gods get along with one another, however. Priests must be careful which gods they carry, or they risk igniting a spiritual war all around them.

You may safely carry three out of the five gods your Order worships at once. You may always carry the center god, but you may not carry any gods whose directions oppose one another. You can carry the north god or the south god, but not both. Likewise, you can carry the east god or the west god, but not both. So long as you honor this rule, the gods will only manifest when you specifically summon them.





MAKE YOUR OWN SPELLS--SATISFY COSTS IN ADVANCE

Don't forget that you can pay the Cost of an Effect in advance. If you wait until you need an Effect, you will be limited by the situation in what you can do. Also, you will never be able to create truly epic Effects, because you will not have the time or ability to satisfy a sufficiently demanding Cost. By paying your Costs in advance, you can be much more creative with them and achieve much greater Effects. Indeed, entire storylines can revolve around setting up and satisfying the Cost of a particularly powerful Effect!

Say a Priest calls upon Weysitlalin (Power Themes Healing, Words, Light) to create a Words Effect--she has an important message from the goddess and wishes to speak and be heard by the entire Empire. She chooses Healing as the Cost of this magic, and narrates that, from now on, everyone she heals with medicine will speak her Words when she chooses to finally deliver her message. When she activates the Effect they will stop what they are doing and speak in unison with her. Therefore, the more people she heals, the more widely her words will be spread.

But if you carry opposing gods, you invite disaster into your life. They will turn the area around you into a divine battlefield in an effort to destroy each others' Sacred Bundles, and you and your companions will inevitably get caught in the cross-fire.

The way this works mechanically is that the Giver is allowed to create effects based on any of the Power Themes of the involved gods, whenever she wishes, without spending any Fortune Points. Essentially, she gets six free Power Themes to use at all times (and this is *not* something you want the Giver to have!). In addition, no Order would willingly allow a member to do this, since it virtually guarantees that at least one of the Sacred Bundles will be harmed, and at least one of the gods will be offended.

Summoning Unfamiliar Gods

A Priest may summon an unfamiliar god, but this is dangerous and unpredictable. The god may take offense if you do not know the proper summoning rituals. And even if you manage to successfully coax the god into action, you will not know how to shape its power.

Mechanically this means that the Giver is allowed to narrate both the Effect and Cost of summoning the unfamiliar god. The only choice the Player gets is whether or not to attempt the summons. Givers are encouraged to be wild and capricious with these effects, because most gods find it very irritating to be summoned by an unfamiliar Priest (imagine a stranger waking you up in the middle of the night and asking to borrow your things). However, the Giver should privately decide on three Power Themes for the god, and base the Effect and Cost on these.

Once each session the Priest may attempt to guess one of the strange god's Power Themes. If she guesses incorrectly, nothing changes. If she guesses correctly, she may record the Power Theme and use it to create her own Effects. If she only knows one the Giver is still allowed to narrate the Cost. But each session she may make another guess. Over time she may be able to discover all three, at which point the god is no longer considered unfamiliar.

FLOWER PRIESTS OF XOCHITLAN

The Flower Priests are the most prestigious of the Priestly Orders. They preside over the coronations of the Wey Tlatoani and Tonalsiwal, and their founding members were the guides of the Tonalteka who returned to the Valley. Politics and religion are closely tied across Semanawak, but no group exemplifies this as well as the Flower Priests.

Center: Weysitlalin (Great Star)

Healing, Words, and Light

East: Teoxotlani (Lighter of the Sacred Flame)

Fire, Leadership, and Blood

West: Chokanantzín (Weeping Mother)

Desire, Destruction, and Pain

North: Tlewachtli (Fire Seed)

Fire, Healing, and Destruction

South: Kwekweponiwitl (Blooming Feather)

Beauty, Creation, and Death

CORN PRIESTS

The Corn Priests protect the breadbasket of the Empire from spiritual harm and disfavor. They track the seasons and determine when farmers plant or harvest their crops. Maize is their religion, and there is nothing abstract about it--maize either grows, or it doesn't. Sacredness to the Corn Priests is that which fills your belly and makes you strong.

Center: Elopaticiztli (Healer of Maize)

Blood, Sweat, and Tears (can be used as metaphors for rain)

East: Teosinte (Sacred Maize)

Plants, Generosity, and Fertility

West: Sipaktli (Earth Caiman)

Water, Earth, and Protection

North: Wakikoatl (Dry Serpent)

Hunger/Thirst, Fatigue, and Blood

South: Akoatl (Water Serpent)

Water, Serpents, and Venom



SINGING PRIESTS

The Singing Priests are the Greeters of the Day and Wind, the first people to see the dawn and feel the wind. Each morning they praise the Sun with songs and music, while each gust of wind that enters the Valley hears their words and listens to their advice. They have the ear of the universe.

Center: Ehekamitotiani (Wind Dancer)

-- Wind, Movement, and Dancing

East: Weysitlalin (Great Star)

-- Healing, Words, and Light

West: Sese kmikwiztli (Death Chill)

-- Cold, Fear, and Destruction

North: Tlatekwinwewetl (Thunder Drum)

-- Storms, Music, and Arrows

South: Elopatiliztli (Healer of Maize)

-- Blood, Sweat, and Tears (can be used as metaphors for rain)

SMOKING PRIESTS

The Smoking Priests are responsible for keeping peace between the warring gods of Earth and the humans who war upon the Earth. Of all the elements, Earth is perhaps the most contradictory. It is creative and destructive, generous and greedy, nourishing and poisoning. The Smoking Priests are the ones who maintain the delicate balance between these forces.

Center: Itztechiwani (Obsidian User)

-- Earth, Tools/Weapons, and Creation

East: Sipaktli (Earth Caiman)

-- Water, Earth, and Protection

West: Itziwitl (Obsidian Feather)

-- Earth, Fire, and Emotion

North: Ometochtli (2 Rabbit)

-- Fire, Water, and Truth

South: Nakoyomiketl (God of Death)

-- Creation, Destruction, and Death

FIRE PRIESTS

The Fire Priests are the only Priestly Order to reside outside of the Valley. Their history comes not from the Tonalteka, but from the Tzatzini, the nomadic raider peoples of the Desert. They are the exception to nearly every rule governing Priests. The people of the Valley consider them to be barbarous folk shamans rather than true Priests. But they are the only Order known that has managed to earn the favor of Oleletletl, the god of fire and war.

Center: Oleletletl (God of War)

-- Fire, Pain, and Weapons

East: Wakikoatl (Dry Serpent)

-- Hunger/Thirst, Fatigue, and Blood

West: Tlewachtli (Fire Seed)

-- Fire, Healing, and Destruction

North: Teoyatinemini (God Who Travels With You)

-- Travel, Perception, and Loyalty

South: Ometochtli (2 Rabbit)

-- Fire, Water, and Truth

DRUNKEN PRIESTS

The Drunken Priests worship paired opposites. They treasure that which brings together contradictory things. Contradictions are where true wisdom hides, and above all else the Drunken Priests seek wisdom.

Center: Ometochtli (2 Rabbit)

-- Fire, Water, and Truth

East: Ximekatl (Counter of Days)

-- Lore, Glyphs, and Time

West: Tlakwepa (Vomit Eater)

-- Filth, Truth, and Healing

North: Tlayomixtli (Night Cloud)

-- Illusion, Creation, and Fire

South: Sipaktli (Earth Caiman)

-- Water, Earth, and Protection

MOON PRIESTS

The Moon Priests are the scar the Kakayawani left upon the Valley. They worship Kakayawani gods according to Kakayawani traditions. They dance Kakayawani dances, chant in the Kakayawani language, and make offerings to their gods the way the Kakayawani did. By doing so, they inspire everything that the Kakayawani inspire: fear, hatred, and respect.

Center: Xolokwani (Bald One)

-- Discord, Theft, and Darkness

East: Ayotini (Last Breath)

-- Stillness/Silence, Breath, and Perception

West: Chokanantzin (Weeping Mother)

-- Desire, Destruction, and Pain

North: Sese kmikwiztli (Death Chill)

-- Cold, Fear, and Destruction

South: Wakikoatl (Dry Serpent)

-- Hunger/Thirst, Fatigue, and Blood





NAWAL SORCERERS

Everyone in Semanawak is born with a Nawal, an animal spirit with whom they share a deep spiritual connection. Nawal Sorcerers are those with a particularly deep bond to these animal spirits. They can see them, speak with them, and even transform into them. A Nawal Sorcerer is one entity with many bodies--a human and a multitude of shadows.

NAWAL STATS

Nawal Sorcerers get access to a special set of Stats. Each one corresponds to a different animal--the Jaguar Stat corresponds to the Jaguar Nawal, the Serpent Stat corresponds to the Serpent Nawal, and so on. Nawal Sorcerers may call upon or transform into their Nawals at will, and in all these circumstances they may call up the relevant Nawal Stat on any Challenges.

For example, say that a Nawal Sorcerer has the Rabbit Nawal Stat. He may, at any time, transform into a Rabbit and do anything a rabbit could plausibly do--run at great speed, dodge under bushes and grass, hide in tiny places, and so on. He could also ask the Rabbit Nawal to do something itself--hide near a window and listen to a secret conversation, run across a courtyard to distract a guard dog, and so on. The Nawal Sorcerer's ability to do these things is not something that can be Challenged. They are innate abilities that the Nawal Sorcerer possesses and can call upon at will.

The Giver and other Players may Challenge specific narrations--for instance, the Giver might Challenge a Rabbit Nawal Sorcerer and say that the Rabbit Nawal gets caught by the dogs as it runs across the courtyard. This would result in a roll, and on that roll the Nawal Sorcerer would be allowed to call up the Nawal Stat, in addition to any other Stats or Themes. But the Nawal Sorcerer is always able to command his Nawals, or transform into them.

Calling up a Nawal Stat requires a Fortune Point, just like any other Stat. Actions taken while in animal form must be plausible--a Nawal Sorcerer in Jaguar form cannot speak, for example, or use a tool. But he can stalk invisibly through the foliage, smell prey from a great distance, and kill with his fangs.

Nawal Sorcerers may choose one Nawal Stat at character creation, and this Nawal Stat starts at rank 3 (plus any points of Day Energy you spend to improve it). They may add additional Nawal Stats, but these cost Day Energy (1 point of Day Energy to gain rank 1 in a new Nawal Stat, from which point it is increased as usual).

NAWAL POWER THEMES

In addition to the above abilities, each Nawal Stat also comes with a Power Theme that allows you to perform magic (that is, magic beyond shapeshifting into an animal!). However, in order to gain access to this Power Theme, you must satisfy the animal spirit that lives within you by giving in to its Instinct, *while in human form*. Nawals allow humans to share their ani-

mal form. It is only fair that you likewise allow animals to share your human form.

Each Nawal Stat has a different Instinct, which represents the literal or symbolic animal nature of the Nawal intruding upon the human. Instincts are invariably difficult to satisfy while in human form, and generally lead to extremely bizarre behavior. This is why Nawal Sorcerers have such strange reputations--not only is it difficult for them to resist giving in to the animal within, they actually become *stronger* by doing so!

You gain one use of Nawal's Power Theme each time you satisfy its Instinct. You may not acquire more uses than your current rank in that Nawal Stat.

LIST OF NAWAL STATS

Caiman/Crocodile

Caimans can swim, hide in the water, and attack with their powerful jaws. They are fierce combatants, particularly when they have the element of surprise, and rule the water like a Tla-toani rules a city.

- Power Theme: Water--The element of water itself fears the caiman's jaws. It will flow, surge, or recede however the caiman directs it.

- Instinct: Gather teeth--the more you get from a single creature, and the fresher they are, the more powerful the effect you can create.

Lizard

Lizards are small and extremely fast, particular in the heat of day. They can climb vertical surfaces with ease, hide in tiny places, and squirm through small openings.

- Power Theme: Heat--Lizards live and die by the warmth they absorb. The ability to channel this warmth is what makes them great. You may focus this ability and raise something to searing temperatures, or you may pull it away and leave a target frigid and cold as a desert night.

- Instinct: Let heat harm you in some way--intense sunburn, heatstroke, burns from a flame, and other source of warmth gives the lizard inside you strength. The more painful it is to the human form, the more powerful the lizard becomes.

Serpent

Serpents are winding, strong, and have the ability to use venom against those they attack (venom is treated as a personal Theme that is attached to anyone who is envenomed).

- Power Theme: Rebirth/Renewal--Heal, detoxify, or minimize the effects of a negative reputation by "shedding your old skin." Your old limitations cannot contain you!

- Instinct: You must obtain and drink snake venom. It is not harmful to drink. But obtaining it will be a great challenge.



Deer

Fast, quiet, graceful, and evasive, Deer are very cautious creatures with well-tuned senses and excellent escape instincts. They are quiet and unassuming, but also very wise. They always know a great deal about the area and where food and danger are. And when moved to anger, deer can be powerful opponents, especially if they sport antlers.

- Power Theme: Lore--Deer are the wisest of animals. They were created by Weysitlalin, and thus they are the keepers of knowledge and insight in nature. They are silent but all-knowing.

- Instinct: Run naked around a settlement (a village, town, city, or at least a campsite) without being seen. Deer are shy and survive by avoiding danger. If a predator catches sight of you, you are already done for--the deer within will flee faster than you can follow.

Rabbit

Fleet, agile, and blessed with remarkable hearing, rabbits are daring creatures with a variety of tricks at their disposal. The life of a rabbit is the life of a daredevil, not by choice but rather by necessity. Rabbits face constant danger and predation, and in order to survive they have become skilled and level-headed about danger. They are fast, but they are also talented burrowers and tunnelers.

- Power Theme: Intoxication--Rabbits are symbols of drunkenness and inebriation, for they often make their burrows among the roots of the maguey plant, from which alcohol comes. They are also symbols of fertility and lust, for no other creature creates so many children. Despite their humble appearance, rabbits wield one of the greatest powers on Earth--the power to make you forget about the future and live in the moment.

- Instinct: Engage in promiscuous sex. Rabbits are free and wild and cannot be contained by the social snares that humans make for themselves.

Dog

Loyal, faithful, and loving, dogs are humanity's guides through life and death. They are spirited and capable combatants with bold voices and sharp teeth, and also skilled trackers with a keen sense of smell. The most common variety is the Xoloitzcuintli hairless dog. However, depending on the individual spirit you bond with, the appearance may vary (wolves are included in this category).

- Power Theme: Guidance--No matter how dark, how dead, how forlorn, or how tempting the path becomes, the dog always knows the way. The guide within you will steer you and those you care about clear of danger and lead you to where you need to be.

- Instinct: You must suffer to protect the ones you love. A dog lives and dies for its pack, and if you wish to hold that noble spirit within yourself, so must you.

Monkey

Clever, mischievous, and temperamental, monkeys are deft and capable of fine action beyond any other animal. They are small and can balance on thin branches. They can sail through the trees, and reach into tiny holes and cracks. They are usually not threatening opponents, but they can be uniquely infuriating, especially if they gain a good position in the trees.

- Power Theme: Emotion--Monkeys do not have claws or fangs or stingers or venom, but even a Jaguar will flee before a troupe of monkeys with the high ground. Their laughter is wild and overwhelming, and could reduce even the proudest creature to tears. Monkeys hold the dignity of all creatures within their human-like hands. They can lift them high up into the canopy, or plunge them down to the most vile depths.

- Instinct: Perpetrate a hilarious but highly inappropriate and cruel prank on another. The monkey within you grows strong on the delightful humiliation of those around you.

Jaguar

Powerful, stealthy, and regal, jaguars are admired but feared by all in Semanawk. They are almost supernaturally elusive, but when they make their presence known they are terrifying. Nothing can stand against their crushing claws and ferocious fangs. They are the shadows that hunger.

- Power Theme: Destruction--Jaguars keep the forces of creation in check. They cull the numbers of their prey and prowl through the nightmares of even the most powerful rulers. No matter how rich or how poor, how powerful or weak, how good or evil, death comes to all things in the form of the jaguar.

- Instinct: Kill someone or something with your teeth. A Jaguar's fangs are like the sacrificial knife of a Priest. They release strength by drawing sacred blood. Making a kill is a ritual as powerful and profound as any the Priests perform, and the creature within you is ever faithful to this belief.

Eagle

Majestic and graceful, eagles are powerful creatures that patrol the skies of Semanawak. They can fly, dive, strike with talons, and cause the Valley to echo with their calls. They are the greatest dancers in the world, and their entire lives are a grand, idealistic performance. An eagle in flight is the embodiment of hopes and dreams.

- Power Theme: Light--Eagles are guardians of the Sun and bringers of its light to Earth. They are shapers of the day. Their wide wings and fearless calls spread brilliance across the world, while their flickering shadows cause prey to scatter in dark, abject terror. Those who look up to see them may be blinded by the shining Sun behind them. Those who don't will linger in dim sadness.

- Instinct: Jump off of something high, or climb up to a very high place. Eagles may land on the Earth briefly, but their home is the Sky. If you wish to awaken their spirit, you must seek the places where the Earth meets the Sky.





Vulture

Vultures are intelligent but grim creature. They are masters of survival because they understand the dark truth about life: everything dies eventually. Some things hunt, some things run, some things swim, and some things fly. Some things die happily, and some things die in terror or sadness. Some things eat meat, and some things eat plants. But all of them eventually end up as carrion, and that is what the vulture eats. They are the means by which death turns into new life.

- Power Theme: Past/Future--Vultures live on the border between life and death. Everything must cross this border at some point, and so vultures see everything. But by simply turning their heads, vultures can look in either direction. They may look back upon life and see the past of each creature that once lived. Or they may look past death and into the new lives to come. They see things that were, and things that will be. In a world that shifts endlessly between day and night, vultures live on the dusky edge, and therefore see into both.

- Instinct: You must eat carrion. To most creatures this is revolting, but to the vulture spirit within you it is the height of holiness. To become one with a creature and with the forces of life and death is what all vultures aspire to. But that process is not a pleasant one for most.

DESTINIES

Destinies are concrete objectives that your character is working towards and will one day accomplish or decisively fail to accomplish. They are defined goals that you will be working towards with your narration. Every character must have at least one Destiny at all times, and they may have as many as three.

Once per game session, when your character makes definite progress towards a Destiny, you may add a point of Day Energy to that Destiny. When you fulfill that Destiny (accomplish it or decisively fail), you receive all the points it has accumulated and may use them to advance your character.

Destinies may be abandoned at any time simply by announcing it. But you lose any Day Energy points on an abandoned Destiny.

At the start of the game, every character in the group must have at least one Destiny in common with everybody else. For example, a group of outcasts might each have I Will Find A New Home as their common Destiny. This is the thread that ties the characters together and gives them a reason to play together.

This common Destiny is mechanically the same as an individual Destiny. Each character acquires his or her own pool of points, and depending on the Destiny, some characters may fulfill it before others do. But it is a goal they all have in common at the beginning of the game.

PLAYING THE GAME

Character Creation is not the end, but rather just the beginning. Your character will change and evolve as the game progresses, adapting to challenges and significant events and moving in directions that even you might never have anticipated. This is an inevitable result of the story and your participation in it. But there are also some specific mechanics that drive these changes.

ADVANCING A CHARACTER

As you play your character and fulfill Destinies, you will earn Day Energy points. You may spend these points to advance your character, add additional facets to his or her personality, and acquire greater narrative power in the story.

ADVANCE A STAT

Advancing one of your Stats works much the same as character creation. You must spend a number of Day Energy points equal to the next rank of the Stat in order to advance it by one rank. For example, in order to go from rank 3 to rank 4, you would have to spend 4 points of Day Energy. You may only increase a Stat by one rank per session. And you may never increase a Stat beyond rank 5.

ADDING OR CHANGING PERSONAL THEMES

As you play your character, you may add additional personal Themes or swap out existing ones for new ones to represent your character growing and changing over time. Doing so costs 2 points of Day Energy per Theme.

Generally you may not add or change more than one personal Theme per session, unless the Giver and other Players agree that such a major change is warranted.

We recommend that no Player take on more than 13 personal Themes at a time to ensure that each Theme is important and relevant. If a Player wants more than 13 personal Themes, he or she should instead replace an existing one that is no longer relevant. However, this is not so much a rule as a suggestion.

EMPHASIZE PERSONAL THEMES

Instead of adding or changing personal Themes, you can instead Emphasize them. Doing so costs 3 points of Day Energy and allows you to throw one additional die each time you call up that personal Theme. Themes usually allow you to throw 3 dice when you call them up, so Emphasizing a Theme once allows you to throw 4 dice, and Emphasizing it twice allows you to throw 5 dice. You may not Emphasize a Theme more than twice.

CUMULATIVE DAY ENERGY COUNT

When you fulfill a Destiny, you acquire Day Energy. It becomes available to spend as described above, and once spent it is no longer available. But spending it does not mean it vanishes. It just means that it has taken a fixed form.



You must keep track of how much total Day Energy you earn over the course of the game. Spending Day Energy does not decrease this cumulative total. Once you acquire it, add it to your cumulative total. This cumulative total is an important part of the Character Death mechanic, which is described below.

CHARACTER DEATH

Life in Semanawak is beautiful, glorious, and fleeting. Everyone comes to the world for a short while. If you are lucky, you discover who they truly are, and leave a legacy that will echo across the world. Then you die and return your life energy to the universe so that it may be reborn in another form. People do not come to Semanawak to live. They are only there for a short while.

It is the same with New Fire stories. Character come in and out of them, make their mark, and then die. However, only a Player can narrate the death of their character. You and you alone choose when and how your character dies.

But just as Semanawak requires death in order to renew itself, so too do New Fire stories require death to continue. When the people of Semanawak stop offering sacrifices to sustain the gods, the world will end. When the Players stop offering their characters, the story ends.

This is one of the most important questions in New Fire: in a world that requires death in order to continue, how will you meet your end?

THE BLEEDING SUN

At the beginning of the game, the Giver of Life secretly determines how many sessions the game will go before a character death is required. Some might choose to roll dice. Some might decide on an arbitrary number. Some might choose to tell the Players how many sessions they have, while others might prefer to keep this a secret. These decisions are entirely up to the Giver. This number of sessions is known as a Bleeding Sun.

The Bleeding Sun rains down Day Energy each game session, and character Destinies are like rain barrels. If the Players pursue their characters' Destinies, they are able to catch some of this Day Energy and use it to advance their characters. But Day Energy rains down from the Bleeding Sun regardless of whether the Players catch it. Eventually, it will run out.

As the Bleeding Sun nears its end, the Giver should drop hints in the form of omens that time is running out and the universe will need to be renewed. At the end of the next to last session, Night Axe shows himself to the characters. He may appear figuratively or literally. He may menace them from afar. Or he may physically attack them. This decision is also entirely up to the Giver.

The session after this is the last session in that Bleeding Sun. If a Player narrates the death of his or her character, the Bleed-



ing Sun is renewed. This Player is referred to as the Sacrifice, and gets a number of special privileges described below, which are based on his or her cumulative Day Energy total for that Bleeding Sun. The Giver again determines how many sessions will pass before another character death is required. The story then continues.

The characters who did not die keep their Stats, Themes, and available Day Energy and continue as they are. The Sacrifice creates a new character. And finally, everybody resets their cumulative Day Energy total back down to zero.

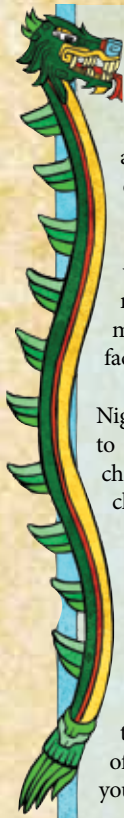
If no Player is willing to Sacrifice his or her character to keep the story going, the game ends. It is up to each group to make sense of what this end means for their story.

SACRIFICE

A Player who narrates the death of his or her character is known as a Sacrifice. If multiple Players narrate character deaths during a Bleeding Sun, then there may be multiple Sacrifices. Sacrifices gain a couple of special privileges for their bravery and devotion to the story.

First, Sacrifices increase their pool of Fortune Points by one for





NIGHT AXE

Night Axe is a special monster in Semanawak. He is the embodiment of fear, more specifically the fear of a glorious death. He appears as a headless corpse with a gaping hole in his chest similar to the wound inflicted during a heart sacrifice, except instead of a wound it is actually a horrible mouth. He wanders the world in search of cowards, and if he catches you he will rip your heart out and feed it to the insatiable mouth in the middle of his chest. He is the walking nightmare of Semanawak, the fear that you will not have the courage to face the pain and terror of an honorable death.

Night Axe enters the game when the Bleeding Sun is about to run dry. The Giver may use him to attack the player characters and warn them that the Sun is drawing to a close and another character death will be required soon.

Night Axe has a physical body. He can be attacked, hurt, driven away, and even "killed," which causes him to melt into a putrid puddle of rotten flesh that is slowly devoured by flies. Once he has been defeated or driven off he cannot return until the next Bleeding Sun. But he cannot be killed permanently. No matter how many times you fight him off, he will always return at the end of the next Bleeding Sun to haunt the night and remind you what fear truly is.



all future characters--instead of 13 Fortune Points, a Sacrifice would have a pool of 14. If a Player Sacrifices multiple characters, he or she can gain this increase multiple times--a Player who has Sacrificed three characters would have 16 Fortune Points for all future characters.

Second, Sacrifices may use their cumulative total of Day Energy points to narrate large scale changes and developments in the game world. They may narrate the outcome of a battle or war, introduce or resolve natural disasters, create or conclude any tensions between kalpultin, altepetls, or nations, and other such broad changes to the setting. Each thing the Sacrifice narrates costs 1 point of Day Energy from the cumulative total.

The Giver, other Players, and other Sacrifices may Challenge these narrations just like any other, in which case the Sacrifice can spend Day Energy points like Fortune Points. Each point of Day Energy gives the Sacrifice 3 dice to roll on any such Challenges.

Any unspent Day Energy points are transformed into bonus Fortune Points that the Sacrifice's new character starts with--for example, if a Sacrifice would normally have a pool of 14 Fortune Points but ended up with 2 unspent points of Day Energy, she would start the next Bleeding Sun with 16 Fortune Points. These bonus points are not refreshed like other Fortune Points--in the previous example, the Sacrifice would still only refresh up to 14. They are a one time bonus.



ALTERNATE RULE: SACRIFICE BECOMES

THE GIVER

Instead of using the Sacrifice mechanic described above, your group might instead choose to let the Sacrifice become the Giver of Life for the next Bleeding Sun. The previous Giver would then create a character and join the group as a Player. Each time a Player Sacrifices a character, that Player gets to become the Giver for the next stage of the game.

Some groups may enjoy this "rotating Gamemaster" idea, as it allows everybody to share the burden of being Gamemaster. Others may find it too chaotic and prefer to keep one person as the Gamemaster throughout the game. It is entirely up to you!

OBJECTIONS

Anybody can raise an Objection to somebody's narration or Condition if they feel something about it is unfair. Objections should be rare, and should not be raised simply because you don't like where somebody else is taking the story. After all, the whole point of the game is that the story will take unexpected turns due to the contributions of many people! Objections should only come up when you feel something is genuinely wrong.

The Giver of Life is the final arbiter on whether an Objection is valid or not, but everybody in the group should get a chance to at least voice their opinion.

OVERWRITING

You may Challenge somebody's narration when it is first established, but once something has been established in the story, everyone must incorporate it into their narratives from then on. You cannot simply ignore it.

Overwriting can be blatant--if somebody establishes that "The Tlatoani awards Ollin a beautiful Tilmatli with a pattern indicating profound royal thanks," you cannot overwrite that by narrating that "The pattern on the Tilmatli actually indicates that you're a wanted criminal."

It can also be far more subtle--if somebody establishes that "The enemy Warrior artfully sidesteps your arrow with obvious grace and agility," you cannot overwrite it by narrating that "The enemy Warrior trips over his own feet as he flees." The Warrior has been established as deft and dextrous, and you cannot simply erase that.

When judging this Objection, however, you must distinguish between overwriting and in-game action. For example, if you establish that Ollin is the Tlatoani of the city of Ilwikakalko and another player narrates a story whereby Ollin is deposed





and someone else ascends to the throne, that is not overwriting--they are using what you established and taking the story in another direction, which is the entire point of the game. Likewise, if you establish some other reason why an agile Warrior would trip and fall (and defend it against Challenges if necessary), you can then go ahead and narrate that--maybe he gets poisoned and becomes dizzy and weak?

You may raise this objection when you feel somebody is undoing something you have contributed, rather than incorporating it.

STRONG-ARMING

Nobody can kill a Player's character except that Player. In addition, nobody can put words into another Player's character's mouth, nor can they force them to do something strongly against the wishes of the Player. Players should be reasonable and create balanced, realistic characters--you cannot claim that your character is literally invincible, for instance, or that you are literally afraid of nothing--but as long as they are being reasonable you cannot force somebody else's character to do something that the Player doesn't want.

In order to avoid doing this, the Giver/Other Players should indicate the direction they want to roleplay towards, but should leave the exact words, explanations, and executions to the Player whose character is involved.

You may raise this objection when you feel somebody is forcing your character to do or experience something that contradicts your vision of that character.

NEGATING

Negating means imposing an overly-limiting Condition on someone else's narration. For instance, say that an enemy is attacking you. You roll and end up with a Dusk roll--the Giver gets narrative control of the outcome, but you get to impose a Condition. You cannot impose the condition "the enemy cannot hurt or scare me in any way," because that would completely negate the action that spawned the Challenge in the first place.

You may raise this objection when you feel somebody is using a Condition to block the story rather than add to it.

OVER-REACHING

Each Challenge can go in many different directions, and people should be congratulated for coming up with a possibility that no else thought of. But sometimes when a person has complete narrative control they may reach beyond the scope of the Challenge.

For instance, if a character is tracking an enemy unit through the desert and they win complete narrative control, he cannot narrate that along the trail he finds the enemy Tlatoani, naked and tied up, with the city's entire treasury heaped up alongside him. That is clearly going beyond the scope of the Challenge! Likewise, you cannot narrate the arrival of aliens on a Chal-

lenge having to do with flower gardening, nor can you slay a god because of a roll having to do with fishing.

You may raise this objection when you feel somebody is abusing their narrative control and going far beyond the bounds of the Challenge.

THE FIVE SUNS LEGEND, PART 6

As told by Teoxiwitl (Precious Turquoise),
Singing Priestess of Ilwikkalko.

THE FIFTH SUN

The gods once again gathered at Tleteoxiwakan, the place where the Fifth Sun was born, and looked up at the dark, empty sky. The world was growing colder. The gods were getting hungrier. They needed a Sun to guide them to good times and greatness, but most of them had tried already, and their creations had failed to bring them nourishment. A call went up: who else wants to give it a try?

Weysitlalin murmured something softly, but no one else heard her, so they assumed that she had said nothing.

CIRCLING VULTURE

Xolokwani the slyest and most deceitful of the heavens, smiled like a crescent moon and spoke loudly:

"Great friends, I believe I am the only one left! I promise that I will lead us to the good times, but before I take my place in the sky I will be needing a few things from you all! Firstly, I shall be needing something to eat, to ensure I have the strength to rule well!"

Though they were hungry, the gods obliged. Oleletletl called his bravest Wolf, Itztechiwani called her most cunning Jaguar, Elopatiliztli called her largest Alligator, and Ehekamitotiani called his most noble Eagle. Every god except Weysitlalin offered their finest as food for Xolokwani. Weysitlalin murmured something softly, but no one else heard her. They had forgotten she was even there, in truth. After slyly pushing the offerings down his secret hole to the Underworld, Xolokwani spoke again:

"Thank you for your offerings! That will surely help. However, all this talking has made me terribly thirsty, and so I shall next be needing something to drink, to ensure I have the wits to rule well!"

Though they were thirsty, the gods obliged. Itztechiwani crafted a goblet from the blackest obsidian, and each god in turn bled into it until it was full to the very top, except for Weysitlalin. She murmured something softly, but no one else heard her. They had forgotten she was even there. After secretly dropping the goblet down his secret hole to the Underworld, Xolokwani spoke again:

"Thank you again for your offerings! This will surely help.





Now, I need just one more thing from all of you. I need you to build me a huge, raging bonfire here at the very top of Tle-teoxiwakan! I am not bright like the rest of you, so I will need these flames to carry me up into the sky where I can guide us to the good times.”

Though they had very little left, the gods obliged. Elopazitl pulled cornsilk from her hair for fuel, Oleletl set it on fire with a touch of his finger, and Ehekamitotiani blew wind on the flame until it became a roaring bonfire. Weysitlalin said nothing, and simply watched from the back. Xolokwani snickered and spoke again:

“You are too kind, great friends! You have done such good work for me that there is no doubt mine shall be the greatest rule of all! Now if you will all step aside, I will enter into these flames and take my place as the final, greatest Sun!”

SMOKING FEATHERS

Xolokwani looked into the flames and started running towards them, but just as he was about to jump into the bonfire his courage failed him, and he stopped short. The flames singed the ragged black feathers on his head, burning many of them off. He looked about sheepishly and smiled his crescent moon smile:

“The fire is a bit hotter than I thought. It surprised me is all! I will try again, and this time I will enter into these flames and take my place as the final, greatest Sun!”

Again, Xolokwani set his gaze on the flames and started running towards them. He got closer than the first time, but again his courage failed him, and he stopped short. The flames scorched the ragged black feathers on his head, burning most of them off. He looked about furtively, the smile gone from his face:

“What are you all staring at? One of you is making the flame flare up just as I am about to jump! Stop it, or I will make you pay! I will try again, and this time I will enter into these flames and take my place as the final, greatest Sun!”

For a third time, Xolokwani fixed his eyes fearfully on the flames and started running towards them. He got even closer, less than a step away, but there was still not enough courage in his cowardly heart to make the jump, and he stopped short. The flames seared the ragged black feathers on his head, burning them all off and leaving him completely bald and shamed. That is why today vultures, and cowards, are marked by their bald heads, the sign of one who was too afraid to achieve glory.

WEYSITLALIN'S LEAP

Suddenly, from the far back, there was a loud battlecry, and Weysitlalin raced forward towards the flames! They had forgotten she was there, for up until now she had been too quiet to hear. She ran into the flames without flinching, and as her body was

consumed the flames turned from the red and orange of normal fire to a beautiful, majestic golden color. The bonfire rose from the peak of Tle-teoxiwakan and ascended into the sky, and the higher it rose the brighter it glowed, until its rays filled the sky and bathed the world in the purest golden radiance.

As the rest of the gods watched Weysitlalin rise up as the Fifth Sun, Xolokwani screeched angrily and desperately threw himself into the few tiny flames remaining from the bonfire. They scorched him and created a great deal of smoke, and though he immediately tried to escape as the pain hit him, his remaining feathers went up quickly, and he too rose into the sky. But his cowardice showed even then, and his rise was barely noticeable compared to Weysitlalin. He bitterly slunk off into the darkest corner of the sky, seeking a place where his dim light would show.

FIFTH SUN RISES

As she rose to her zenith, Weysitlalin spoke down to the gods and to the world. Her voice was like the purest conch shell horn, like a thousand voice choir in perfect harmony:

“I have watched these ages passed, and I have learned from your mistakes. But my mistake was perhaps the greatest of all. I will tell it to you now so that you may learn from it yourselves.”

“As I watched these ages pass, I always saw what was going to happen. I always knew the problem before it occurred. But I feared to speak up, to declare loudly and strongly what I knew to be right. I feared to lead even though I knew the way, and this fear caused the deaths of four ages, of four races of people.”

“But I know the way now, my friends. I will lead you to good times. For now and forever, I will live as your guiding light. Join me, and we will make this world right!”

And so the gods joined Weysitlalin the Fifth Sun, and they made the world right. They made us and the world in which we live. Weysitlalin still shines down upon us, and we keep her and the other gods nourished. We are the People of the Sun, and this is our duty!

There is darkness in the sky, and it seeks to rule even today. It is the way of things that ages end and death claims us. But sing your songs, oh People of the Sun! Find meaning and offer nourishment to the gods and each other, for you know now the story of your house, of the world that is our home and the Sun that warms us! There is still much you do not know, much history you are unaware of. But the Sun is setting on this tale. Tell it to all you know so that it may rise again!

And know one last thing, oh People: As long as the world endures, your fame and glory will never perish!



GIVER OF LIFE

The Giver of Life is the Gamemaster of New Fire, and as with any game, being the Gamemaster can be an awful lot of work! We cannot eliminate this need for work, but we can offer you some advice about how to work effectively and get the most out of your New Fire sessions. So we will conclude this book with some advice for how to prepare and run a New Fire game, based on our experiences during playtesting.

NARRATIVE UNITS

Like books, movies, TV shows, and pretty much any other form of storytelling, New Fire is not just an unsorted sequence of events. The story is divided up into a number of different units, the same way a book is divided into chapters and a TV show is divided into episodes and seasons. These units keep things organized and punctuated, and also provide a certain amount of momentum that drives the story towards exciting situations and drama.

As the Giver of Life, it is your job to frame the scenes, narrate the transitions, and generally keep things orderly and in motion. You may sometimes let the Players frame certain scenes or narrate certain transitions, but you must always be prepared to step in if nobody else does.

SCENE

A Scene is a short, dramatically interesting part of the story. It typically takes place in one location with a relatively fixed number of characters (though sometimes additional character may enter mid-scene) and focuses in detail on a few ideas and plot points. A Scene might be a conversation with somebody, a fight, a religious ceremony, or some other notable event worth spending time on.

Think of New Fire Scenes like scenes in TV shows and movies. You shouldn't cover every single minute of every single day in detail. Instead, you jump between the interesting parts, and quickly summarize the stuff in between. Some in-game days may have multiple Scenes within them. Other times, Scenes might be spaced out across weeks or months.

Anyone can ask for a Scene. If you want to focus on something in greater detail, simply say 'I'd like to have a Scene,' figure out how it would start, and go from there. Session time is limited, so be judicious. But don't hesitate to ask for a Scene if you notice the possibility for such.

TRANSITIONS

Transitions are the connections between Scenes. They are brief summaries or montages that lead from one Scene to the next and establish context and pacing. They can be quick, sometimes just one or two sentences, and serve to maintain a sense of continuity. If the Players conclude one Scene and the next one isn't set to occur until a week later in-game, a Transition will briefly describe the time you are "skipping." The Giver is

usually the one to narrate Transitions, though Players are free to speak up and suggest additions.

Transitions should focus on changes--changing seasons, changing weather, changing attitudes--because this is what gives a sense of time passing. They are good places to establish mood. For instance, if the Players are moving around trying to prevent a war from breaking out, the Transitions might include quick descriptions of ordinary people packing up and preparing to move, stockpiling supplies and equipment, and suspiciously scrutinizing strangers. If the Players have recently done something newsworthy, they might hear snippets of conversation about it during Transitions.

SESSION

A Session is a time during which everyone gets together and plays New Fire. If you get together one evening, play for three hours, and then go home, that is a Session. But Sessions are also narrative units. They are a sequence of Scenes and Transitions that each cover a particular span of the story. You might have one every few days, every week, every month, or sporadically whenever you feel like it, but there is in-game continuity between Sessions--the end of one will be the beginning of the next. Think of them like an episode of a TV show.

We recommend that, at the end of each Session, the group briefly discusses what will take place during the next Session and what general direction they are interested in going. This ensures that everyone is on the same page and gives people a chance to plan a little bit for what lies ahead. It also creates a sense of suspense and anticipation for what is to come (Next week on New Fire...!).

BLEEDING SUN

Bleeding Suns are groups of Sessions that all relate to a particular storyline and are punctuated by dramatic character deaths. They typically focus on a particular adventure or group of interrelated adventures and contain within them a complete dramatic arc. The end of a Bleeding Sun indicates a major change in story direction, and major changes in the characters. Think of them as seasons of a TV show.

CAMPAIGN

A Campaign is a group of Bleeding Suns. It reflects an entire long running story in a consistent and continuous world. Unlike the other dramatic units, a Campaign has no definite end. It may last for one Bleeding Sun or a hundred. It all depends on how long the group is interested in playing.

HOW TO PREP FOR NEW FIRE

New Fire is not a game for railroaders. The mechanics are designed to create a very organic story that evolves rapidly and unpredictably by combining lots of ideas. If you try to prepare by planning out intricate storylines or plot twists far into the future, you will quickly become frustrated because most of these plans will fly out the window after one or two Chal-





lenges! In many other RPGs Players follow the story that the Gamemaster tells them. In New Fire, the entire group makes up the story as they go along, and every Player has the power to radically alter that story at a moment's notice.

New Fire is also not a game for number crunchers. The number part of the mechanics is very simple. Players have few stats to work with, and monsters don't have any stats at all--just a few Themes to weave into the scenes. If you have a good idea, you can create a New Fire scenario with monsters and non-player characters and everything in just a few minutes.

This makes preparing for New Fire both easy and hard. It is easy in that you don't have to plot things out far in advance or do a bunch of paperwork before and after the session. And because you don't have an end goal in mind, you will never get frustrated when the Players stray from that goal. You can instead focus on the moment by moment drama of the game. But it is also difficult because you must always come to the session with plenty of ideas to throw on the table that may or may not get used. The Players will need things to react to in order to keep the story going, and you must always be ready to supply those things. But you must also be ready to throw away prepared ideas in response to Challenges and sudden changes in the story.

The trick about Players is that they generally don't need much to get going in a scene. If you give them an interesting situation that inspires their curiosity or invites them to form an opinion, they will throw out all kinds of interesting ideas. It is like rolling a snowball down a hill--all you need to do is get it started and then get out of the way!

Occasionally a scene will conclude or begin to grow stale. The snowball will get stuck. That is when you must be ready to step in and stir things up again. You must either modify the scene to keep it interesting, or you must take them to a fresh new scene.

PRINCIPLE NUMBER 1:

PREPARE SCENES, NOT ENTIRE STORIES

We recommend that you focus on preparing lots of individual scenes. They do not have to be related to each other or have any sort of continuity between them. They also do not have to be long. Here are a few examples:

- The Players happen upon two groups arguing over who owns a beautiful jade pendant.
- Jaws of Sipaktli pour out of a cave and attack anybody nearby.
- The Players enter a town and discover that a Nawal Sorcerer has declared ownership of it.

These three scenes could easily lead to an entire session of

rewarding gameplay, and if you work them into the story as it develops you will be able to make them seem completely seamless and connected. Continuity isn't created in advance. You create it as you go.

Scenes can absolutely emerge spontaneously. At any point during this sequence of events, the Players or the Giver can introduce new scenes that make sense in the story. It is entirely possible that the Giver might start the session with one prepared scene and then spend the rest of the time making up new scenes on the fly as the Players react to it. But you should always be ready with several ideas in case the story needs a boost or a new twist to get it going again.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD SCENE?

The key to creating good, adaptable New Fire scenes is to come up with a detailed, specific situation or conflict--the jade pendant, the Jaws of Sipaktli, the personality of the Nawal Sorcerer--while keeping the lead in and the resolution very general. That way you can introduce these scenes in any order and with any details that makes sense at the time, and allow the Players room in the story to add their own ideas.

For example, say the Players have befriended a young nobleman and are enjoying traveling along with him. You could introduce the first scene on the list by making him one of the two groups--perhaps he passes someone in the market who is wearing the jade pendant and claims that it is his! The Players decide to take the nobleman's side, so the other people in the market becomes thieves. The scene unfolds and concludes with the thieves fleeing out into the countryside.

As the Players pursue them, the thieves stop at the mouth of a cave and sound a shrill, piercing whistle that seems to echo forever. Shortly after, a tremendous roar explodes from the cave, followed by an eruption of Jaws! That scene progresses and resolves with the Players abandoning the chase and running for their lives from the rampaging Jaws.

They run for so long that they get lost and end up stumbling upon a strange town in the countryside that none of them can remember hearing about. They discover that the leader of the town is a mysterious Nawal Sorcerer who has also lost something to the people the Players were chasing. He might be willing to help them, if they agree to bring something of his back--a beautiful Jade Pendant that was taken from him several weeks ago!

There are countless other ways to work these same scenes together to create different stories. The Players could start in the village with the Nawal Sorcerer and find him to be a cruel tyrant instead of a friend. They flee from him only to run into groups from two neighboring villages who are also enemies with the Nawal Sorcerer, but don't like each other, either. One of them has a magical jade pendant that supposedly can absorb the Nawal Sorcerer's power, but neither group trusts the other with it. The Players try to make peace between the groups, but





to no avail. As they bicker, one of them drops the jade pendant and when it hits the ground a deep rumble sounds through the Earth. The ground rips asunder, and from the crack comes a horde of Jaws.

Good scenes can be mixed around and rearranged like this. They can begin and end in many different ways, and they can be interpreted in many different ways depending on the other things happening around them. When creating a scene, try to imagine at least three different ways it could begin and three different ways it could end. If you can do that, it is probably adaptable enough to use.

Another way to think about it is to treat each scene like an open-ended question that invites the Players to answer it. Create something incomplete or unstable that the Players cannot help but get involved with. The best example of this sort of scene is *Shadows in the Night*--the characters are sitting around a campfire and they see a dark shape creeping around their camp. What could it be?

The trick here, of course, is that the Giver never actually has to come up with anything, and should in fact avoid doing so! The whole point is to let the Players' fear and curiosity literally come to life in the game world. They may decide the shadow is a monster, a lost child looking for help, a Kakayawani raider, a ghost of someone's ancestor, someone's Nawal animal, or literally anything else. It isn't actually decided until somebody wins the Challenge. And if you describe the shape in an interesting way, or if there are omens or rumors floating around to stimulate peoples' imaginations, the Players will be happy to come up with all kinds of things that the shape could be, and will gladly Challenge each other to try to be the one who gets to choose!

SITUATIONAL THEMES

One of the most important duties of the Giver is to make sure that the Players always have plenty of situational Themes to play with. Players are free to propose situational Themes, but ideally they should be so absorbed in the scene that they're just reacting to things. You should constantly be looking at the situational, distilling it into its dramatic elements, and putting those elements on the table for everybody to use.

Some scenes may be little more than a handful of situational Themes ready to enter the game--Tribal Loyalty, Loose Soil, Dry and Flammable, Looking for Someone to Blame, and other dramatic sounding ideas can spring to life at a moment's notice. You can combine these Themes to create a scene, or you can add them to any other scene to modify it and give it a new twist.

When planning a scene it is always a good idea to come up with three or four situational Themes that may be present in that scene. You can and should add others on the fly as you see fit. But as always, it is good to have something to fall back on in a pinch.

PRINCIPLE NUMBER 2:

FOCUS ON THE SESSION, NOT THE CAMPAIGN

A group may play *New Fire* for several months, but the game always unfolds one session at a time. Therefore, the best way to prepare is to focus completely on each session. Concentrate on making each one as good as possible. Come up with scenes you want to introduce now, not scenes you want to introduce later. After all, later sessions may never happen for any number of reasons, and you don't want Players to miss your best ideas. So rather than taking that risk, lead with your best ideas, and trust yourself and your Players to come up with more good ideas as you go.

New Fire stories are interesting because of what happens moment by moment. They are also interesting to look back on and remember how they were created. But you cannot look too far forward, because the future parts of the story have yet to be determined. Playing *New Fire* is not like reading a book. You are not reading something that someone has already written. You are making it up as you go, and if you try to write too far ahead the Players will inevitably change directions or alter the story in a major way, and you will have to come up with something else anyway. You might as well spend your time coming up with ideas for now.

In addition, the story suffers when you bring preconceptions or an agenda to a game of *New Fire*. People can and will mess with and change your ideas. That is the entire point of the game! If you have some future event that you are focused on, you will see any deviation from it as an error, rather than an opportunity to find something new. If you look too far ahead or hold too rigid about something, you will miss the possibilities right in front of you.



Ultimately, *New Fire* is a game about moments. The clever use of Themes, the inspired narrative twist that someone came up with, the epic bit of dialog, the amazingly glorious character death, and so on are what make the game memorable. You cannot plan for these, and you cannot force them. But you can create a good environment for them by making sure that each session is filled with lots of opportunities. Don't spend your prep time coming up with ways to keep the Players on track. Spend it creating an interesting space for them to play in, and making whatever area they wander into as fun as possible.





HOW MUCH POWER DO I HAVE?

New Fire grants much more power to the Players than most other games. The story belongs to everybody, and so everybody has the right to contribute. Players are allowed to make very significant decisions about the game world and progression of the story. They can create villains and monsters out of thin air, add clues to a mystery that completely change the outcome, make up social customs and religious rituals on the spot, and so on. The Giver or other Players can Challenge any such additions if they want. But essentially, anybody can add anything they like to the story. It is on everybody's honor to be responsible with this and choose genuinely interesting additions, rather than random nonsense.

The guiding principle is that Players get authority over the things their characters are good at. If a character is a Warrior, then that Player should get a lot of authority over rules of warfare and the Warrior code of honor. If a character is a Priest, then that Player should get a lot of authority over religious matters like ceremonies and omens and the will of the gods. If a character is a Nawal Sorcerer, then the Player should get a lot say over how the spirits feel and act in the world.

While Players may put forward narrations at any time, the Giver is assumed to be the default narrator in between Challenges. If a Player wins a Challenge, he or she gets to narrate the outcome of that Challenge. And during each scene, each

Player should be granted a chance to narrate something, which may or may not be Challenged. But after a Player narrates the outcome of a Challenge, or if nobody else is actively narrating, the Giver can and should take the lead and keep the story going.

In some ways this takes a lot of the pressure off the Giver--if a Player asks "What have I heard about the village of Tletetl?", you can smile and say "I don't know--what *have* you heard?" The Player can then make up the rumor their character has heard, and if it sounds reasonable you run with it! If you have another idea, you can Challenge the rumor. But it also means that the Giver must be extremely good at improvisation, because the Players can also Challenge you if they don't like your rumor!

ORGANIZING A GROUP

The Giver is usually the one responsible for putting the group together. You must contact all the Players, schedule the sessions, and clearly communicate when and where people should show up to play. This can be a pain, but if you don't do it you will not have a group to play with. And if you expect your Players to be reliable and put effort into the game, you must be willing to do the same.

COMMUNICATION

Countless RPGs never get past the "We should totally do a campaign sometime!" stage, simply because nobody steps up and gets everybody organized. There are many options for commu-

nication--social media sites, email, regular game nights, and so on--but you should pick one that everybody uses reliably and use it regularly to ensure that people get used to checking it. Phone calls can work, but it is easy to end up playing phone tag and this can really bog down the planning.

Be clear and goal-oriented when setting up your sessions. Have a time and a place already picked out before you put the group together. If people have a time and place to consider, they can give you a definite yes or no. But if you ask several people what times and places work for them, you will get a different answer from each person, and it will be very difficult to get an agreement.

SELECTING GROUP MEMBERS

New Fire depends very heavily upon having a good group of people. The rules assume that everybody has interesting ideas, a reasonable sense of fairness, and a desire to create a good shared story. They are not designed to be "jerk-proof" in any way. Therefore, you must select Players who are not jerks! Our goal in designing the game was to create a system that lets good ideas shine, rather than trying to insulate it against bad ideas. You should select the other people in the group accordingly.

Perhaps "jerk" is too strong a word. We certainly don't want to judge anyone unfairly. There are many people in the world who are good friends and are perfectly enjoyable to spend time with in most circumstances, but the second you try to play an RPG with them they become disruptive, combative, and overbearing. This is what we mean when we say "jerk"--they are jerks when they play RPGs.

On the other hand, there are other people who are not particularly fun to hang out with normally, but are an absolute joy to play RPGs with. It is difficult to pinpoint what makes a person fun to play games with, but you definitely know it when you see it.

Ideally, you will have group members who are fun to spend time with no matter what you do. But if you want to play New Fire, you will have to make sure that the people you invite will be fun to play New Fire with. They must be reliable, fair-minded, interested in the whole story and not just their own little section of it, able to set aside the need to compete, reasonably dedicated to playing, and they must get along with the other people in the group.

You will also want to make sure that the group is appropriately sized. The ideal size for a New Fire group is one Giver and three or four Players. Too few people make it hard to generate enough ideas to keep the story interesting. Too many people lead to slow, frustrating sessions because each person only gets to do a few things.



MONSTERS AND OPPONENTS

Semanawak is full of many wonderful and terrifying creatures: Jaws of Sipaktli, Kamazotz, Koatls, the Fleshless, and many others. To the Giver, these creatures are just ideas. They do not have Stats. They never roll dice. They may have Themes associated with them, but otherwise they have no mechanics whatsoever. Their abilities rely entirely on the imagination of the group. Likewise, non-player characters have no Stats or mechanics aside from a few Themes that the Players may call up as well.

But to the Players, these creatures can be as scary or amazing as you make them. They can do anything the you say, be as strong or as devious or as formidable as you wish. True, you cannot kill the Player characters. But there are countless things in Semanawak worse than death!

THE PLAUSIBILITY PRINCIPLE

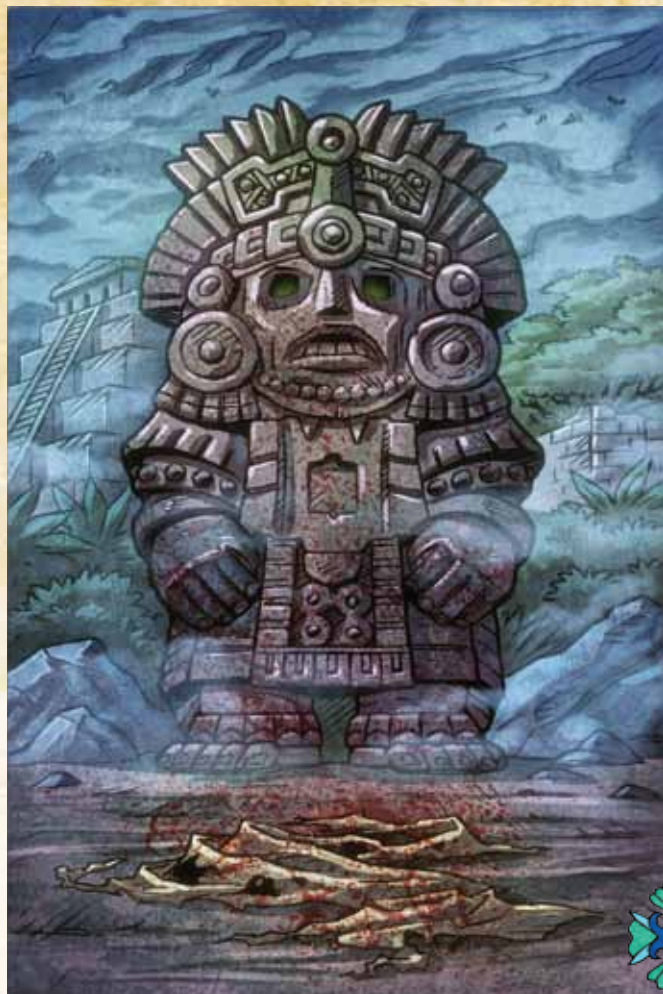
The key to making non-player creatures interesting is to remember that, regardless of who wins a Challenge, all narration in New Fire must be plausible, based on what has already been established. If it is established that a Jaw of Sipaktli is big and huge and can crush a tree into splinters with its teeth, then any narration must factor that in. A Player would not be able to narrate that the Jaws suddenly have trouble biting through something softer and weaker than a tree, like a deer carcass (or a body part!). If the Jaws have been established as inhumanly strong, then no human can simply overpower them, no matter how good they roll.

Instead, Players must come up with a creative, plausible way to defeat or escape from the Jaws that makes sense to everybody at the table (plausible in the context of a fantasy game, that is!). If the Jaws are strong but cumbersome, the Player might trick them into falling off a cliff. They might narrate a terrifying back and forth where the Jaws crash through obstacles trying to reach them only to finally fall when the character manages to circle behind them and stab deep into their neck before being thrown clear by their dying convulsions. The goal behind this spare, flexible system is that tougher monsters inspire more amazing narration, because only something amazing could kill a monster so tough!

This cuts both ways, of course. If a Player character is established as nimble and agile, you cannot narrate that they trip over their feet. Even you must bow to the plausibility rule. But ultimately plausibility should serve as a challenge to tell better stories, not as an impediment. Plausible does not mean likely or average. It means dramatically satisfying.

CREATURES OF SEMANAWAK

We have created a small list of some of the creatures in Semanawak along with some inspirational artwork and a few Theme suggestions. However, these creatures are by no means the limit. Givers and Players can add anything they like to Semanawak. And because they have no Stats or explicit mechanics, creating them is as easy as dreaming them up!



ANIMATED STATUE

Whether bustling metropolis or ancient ruins, the cities of Semanawak are full of statues. Some of these statues depict human-like figures--great rulers, gods in human form, ancient heroes, and so on. Others depict more animalistic subjects--giant serpents, jaguars, caimans, and many others. Still others look like something out of a dream. Or nightmare. Statues remain stationary most of the time, and this leads many people to assume that they are simply dead pieces of carved stone. But are the statues of Semanawak really incapable of moving? Or do they simply choose not to most of the time?

There are some who believe that statues possess a consciousness as powerful as any human's, that each has its own personality and goals. Some say that statues gain this will when they are created. Others claim that that they develop it over time as they age. Still others insist that only certain statues become so charged with energy that they awaken. Regardless of your feelings on this matter, however, most stories about moving statues come from the ancient ruins of Tletoxiwakan, home of the ancestral Tonalteka and the place where the Sun itself was born.

Though all but the highest ranking Priests are forbidden from entering Tletoxiwakan, there are no human guards. Most





people have the good sense to keep a respectful distance. But there are some fools who take the risk and sneak in. Some are pilgrims who seek to prove their faith to the gods or die trying. Some are treasure seekers looking for priceless Tonalteka artifacts to sell to the unscrupulous or use for their own devious ends. But most who enter are never heard from again. Their screams echo off of the crumbling stone walls, accompanied by a deep, ominous rumbling. Most simply disappear, but occasionally their bloody remains are found at the feet of the statues. They are the true guardians of the ruins.

Animate Statues only move when you aren't looking. You turn your back on them and hear a deep rumble, and when you turn around they are right on top of you. Each has a different personality, but they all have a goal, a purpose that drives them to move. Duty, vengeance, cruelty, and countless others--there is a desire that burns within the stone, and occasionally shines out through the eyes.

Some Theme Suggestions:

- Fists Like an Avalanche
- Ravaged by Time
- Patience and Calm of the Eons
- Feel Our Gaze
- Stable as Stone, Swift as a Shadow

AWIZOTL

Water is clear, but countless things hide within it. Some are strong and brutal, like the caiman. Some are tender and delicious, like the fish. But of all the things that hide beneath the shimmering surface of the rivers and lakes of Semanawak, none are as crafty and clever as the water spirits known as Awizotls.

Awizotls are strange-looking creatures, though few ever catch more than a glimpse of them. Their bodies are extremely hairy, like that of a monkey. Their hands are skilled and dextrous, like those of a human. Their heads are like those of a dog, with large ears and a long, pointed snout. But their oddest features are their tails.

Each Awizotl has an extremely long, bald, opossum-like tail that they use like an extra arm. It can slither like a serpent or strike like a club, depending on the situation. It can stretch or shorten at will, and at the end of it is another disturbingly human-like hand. This hand-tail is all most people ever see of an Awizotl, before it snatches them and pulls them under. They use them like a fisherman uses a lure, except instead of catching fish, Awizotls catch humans. There are countless stories of foolish people lured to their deaths by cunning Awizotls who know just what sorts of things people find tempting. Such people usually wash up on shore a few days later missing their hair, their teeth, and their fingernails--these are the trophies that Awizotls value.

Awizotls rule the world beneath the water like nobles rule the land. They each claim a patch of territory and preside over the fish as rulers and Priests. Within their domain, the currents flow as they wish and the creatures obey their will. They worship many of the same gods as humans, most notably Akoatl and Elopatiliztli, and may call upon their powers just like any human Priest. Humans live on the land, and use the stones that comprise it to fashion tools, weapons, structures, and any number of marvelous and terrible things. Awizotls do the same with the water that comprises their home.

Some Theme Suggestions:

- A Hand Always Out of Sight
- Water that Beckons
- Command the Currents
- Drowning Grip
- As Frightening As the Stories!





AXOLOTL

Most Axolotls are small, salamander-like creatures with long feathery gills who swim about peacefully in Lake Ketzalatezkatl. They prey on fish and worms and sometimes serve as food for the villages on the lake shore. But occasionally one grows so large that fish are no longer enough, and humans seem like worms. These giant troll-like horrors lurk in the deeper parts of the Lake, preying on unwary boaters and sometimes even venturing onto land to attack lone travelers. Their behavior never really changes as they grow. They just gradually get big enough to eat humans as well.

Full grown Axolotls are immensely strong, but they are not ag-

gressive creatures. They are calm and tenacious and do everything slowly and methodically. Though they are not particularly smart or fast, they are very patient. It takes them a long time to figure anything out, but they are willing to sit and plan an attack for weeks before finally making a move so that, when they do move, there is not even a chance that their prey will escape. This calm, passionless approach to hunting is grimly effective, and few ever forget the sight of an Axolotl slowly and calmly ripping a man apart and carefully swallowing each limb one by one.

It is virtually impossible to permanently kill a full grown Axolotl. They are blessed with terrifying regenerative powers and can easily heal even the most grievous injuries. They can regrow limbs, eyes, and even their heads. Small Axolotls take several days to recover from such damage, but as they grow bigger they heal faster and faster, to the point where a man-sized Axolotl can heal wounds almost as quickly as a Warrior can make them. Their meat is extremely valuable to healers, who use its regenerative qualities to create powerful medicine. But it is very hard to obtain, and few are willing to carry it around for fear that each piece will grow into a new Axolotl!

In addition to regrowing their own limbs, Axolotls are also capable of accepting the limbs of other creatures, and frequently seek out new limbs from time to time like a human selecting the right tool for a job. They simply rip off their own limb and stick on the new one, and in moments it becomes

as much a part of their body as the ones they grow themselves. Some have even been seen with human heads upon their shoulders.

Some Themes Suggestions:

- Clumsy Brute
- Unbreakable Patience
- It Always Grows Back
- Merciless Calm
- Anything Smaller Than Me is Food



KAMAZOTZ

Kamazotz, also known as "Death Bats," are terrifying spirits that haunt the night skies of Semanawak. They are the night time aspect of the Sun Warriors who escort the Sun through the sky. Warriors who die in battle or on the sacrifice stone are rewarded with the privilege of marching across the sky with the Sun each day, and during the day they shine with bright, brilliant benevolence. But when the Sun sets, their light sets with it, and they transform into dark and shadowy versions of themselves--Kamazotz--until the next dawn.

Kamazotz are thieves and blood-drinkers who prey upon the sleeping creatures of the day.

They possess the power to drain and make use of the power and abilities of others, and they slip silently through the darkness on leathery wings, searching for unwary fools to drain and sacrifice to the moon. But while their actions frequently set them at odds with humans, they, like all creatures in Semanawak,

serve an important role in the universe. Humans fight to sustain the Sun.

Kamazotz are the ones who sustain the Moon. The blood they take with their knives and their fangs is what keeps Xolokwani alive.

Of course, not all servants are as devoted to the gods as humans. Kamazotz are erratic and inconstant, and therefore the Moon waxes and wanes over time. On the night of the new moon, when Xolokwani is weak and on the verge of death, the Kamazotz panic and swarm out into the night to bleed anything they can catch and save their god. These dark nights are when Kamazotz are most active, and few dare to venture out. This frenzy of offerings revives the starving Moon god and returns him to strength. But when the Moon is full and strong, the Kamazotz grow lazy and complacent and forget their duties. Xolokwani gradually grows weaker and weaker from this neglect, and so the moon shrinks and dwindles again. Therefore, the phases of the Moon coincide with, and are caused by, the fickle devotion of the Kamazotz.

Some Theme Suggestions:

- Knife in the Dark
- Just Out of Reach, Just Out of Sight
- Steal Your Strength
- A Little Bit is Good Enough



SIWATETED

Siwateteos are cunning shape-shifters and deceivers who prowl around the outskirts of cities and villages by night. They are the nocturnal aspect of the Shining Ladies, the blessed spirits of women who died during childbirth. Birth is a spiritual struggle between the mother and the forces of the Underworld and is every bit as deadly and glorious as warfare. Women who die bravely during this struggle are the equals of Warriors who die in battle, and likewise rise into heaven to accompany the Sun through the sky each day.

During the day, they care for the Sun as devoted mothers. But when the Sun sets, when their radiant child dies and passes into the Underworld, these women are driven mad by grief





and transform into Siwateteos until the next dawn. They scour the world looking for other children to capture and keep as replacements. If no children are to be found, they will instead try to seduce men in order to gain new children of their own. And if anybody thwarts them, they will exact terrible, malicious vengeance. Just as a Kamazotz is the dark reverse of a Sun Warrior, a Siwateteo is the dark reverse of a Shining Lady, an inversion of all her virtues.

Siwateteos are masters of disguise and deception. They can copy the appearance and voice of anybody they've met, and they can intuitively sense the thoughts of those around them. They use these powers to spread fear and discord among communities and trick others into fulfilling their malevolent desires. They may capture a child by taking the form of his mother and coaxing him out into the night. They may fool a man by taking the form of his wife and seducing him (imagine the horror when his real wife walks in!). And they may infiltrate any gathering by sneaking in from the shadows and subtly shifting between multiple forms until they gradually arrive at the one that gains them access to a vulnerable

child or a weak-willed man.

Siwateteos are extremely difficult to detect, and even if you do see through their disguise there is little chance of survival--the Siwateteo will simply revert to her natural form and eviscerate you with her terrible claws. But though they are dangerous to all who stand in their way, Siwateteos avoid harming other women whenever possible, and sometimes go to great lengths to help and protect them. This is especially true for pregnant women, who Siwateteos regard as sisters. More than one abusive husband has died horribly in the night as punishment for his offenses, and many women actively maintain friendships with Siwateteos to benefit from such protection.

Some Theme Suggestions:

- That Which You Most Desire
- A Face You Trust
- Tearing Claws
- Deadly Love
- I am your Sister in the Sky

FLESHLESS

The Fleshless are the traveling dead, the spirits of people who died and now journey through the Underworld. They seek the lowest levels of the afterlife and their final meeting with Nakoyomiketl, which determines whether they will join with Sun in heaven or vanish into nothingness for all eternity. They are rarely seen above ground, but sometimes they discover cracks in the boundary between worlds and venture back up onto the surface for various reasons. Some come back to gather objects they need below. Others come back to see their loved ones again. Still others flee the Underworld in the vain hope that they might escape their inevitable end. Humans are infinitely varied in their goals and personalities, and therefore so are the Fleshless.

Fleshless resemble walking, talking skeletons. Their exact appearance varies depending on the manner of their death and funeral. If a person is missing an arm at death, their Fleshless form will also be missing that arm unless it is recovered and reunited with the body. If a person is simply buried (this is what happens for most Masewaltin funerals), their Fleshless will have a dirty appearance because of all the bits of rotting skin and muscle clinging to it. If a person is cremated, their Fleshless will have a charred, blackened quality. And if a person is bundled up and mummified (usually only done for rulers or high ranking Tlatokay), their Fleshless will be clean and pristine.

Fleshless glow with an eerie, otherworldly light. They carry with them all the light they gathered in life, and this shines out of their eyes, mouth, ribcage, and through their skulls. It

forms strange patterns that hint at their thoughts and memories and move almost like animated pictures. When a Fleshless first arises, its light is strong and constant. But the longer a Fleshless travels the dimmer this light gets. If he or she doesn't reach the end of the journey, or somehow acquire more light, it will eventually fade away entirely, at which point the Fleshless collapses into dead ash.

It typically takes about four years for a Fleshless to either complete the journey or turn to ash. But some diabolically inventive individuals in the Underworld have discovered ways to steal light from each other or from the living in order to prolong their ultimate demise. These abominations may linger for hundreds of years this way, periodically draining the light out of any they can catch. It is a terrifying mockery of life and the natural order, but so long as they keep the light within them alive, they will never fade entirely. For some twisted, desperate Fleshless, that it is all that matters.

Pray that you never fall into their cold, skeletal grasp.

Some Theme Suggestions:

- Lifetime of Memories
- I Feel No More Pain
- Light in a Dark Place
- The Darkness of Desperation

HEARTLESS

During a heart sacrifice to Weysitlalin, the Priest cuts open the sacrifice's chest, removes the heart, offers it to the Sun, and then throws it into a large sacred fire. If the heart is worthy, it burns clear and true as the gods feast upon its energy and draw its spirit up into heaven. But if the heart is cowardly or weak, it instead generates a thick plume of black smoke that envelops the Priest and force her to stop the ritual. When the smoke clears, the person being sacrificed will sit up on the altar, still alive but forever shamed. He is now a Heartless, a rejected sacrifice.

Heartless are some of the most unfortunate, pitiful creatures in Semanawak. Priests immediately chase them out of the cities

when they are created to avoid drawing further ire from the gods. Nobody outside the cities will take them in for fear that the Heartless will attempt to steal a heart to replace the one that was lost. And as time passes the Heartless will slowly rot until nothing but a heap of stinking slime remains. They are the ultimate failure of the individual and society--the individual should have been stronger, and society should have known better than to offer one so wretched to the gods.

Most Heartless live a miserable, ghoulish existence in some disgusting, forgotten corner of the world. They are hollow shells of humanity, alive but lacking anything that could possibly make life worth living. They feel pain and they can be injured, but they can never heal. Cuts, bruises, and broken bones fester and remain forever. They feel hunger and thirst, but no amount of food or water can ever satisfy them. It simply gets worse until it ultimately drives them insane. They can suffer, but they can never die.

The only way a Heartless can experience relief is to steal the hearts of others. They must take a healthy, brave heart and place it into their chest, where their own heart used to be. So long as they have a substitute heart, they can live normally. Their injuries will begin to heal, their hunger and thirst will subside, and their bodies will stop rotting all around them. But this is not a permanent solution. Nothing can stop the decay of the stolen heart, and within a week it has usually rotted away to nothing, forcing the Heartless to seek out yet another.

Nobody knows if and how a Heartless can ever redeem himself and go on to a proper afterlife. There are some stories about this, but they are morality tales told for the benefit the living, rather than instructions for how to actually save anyone. In the eyes of most, the Heartless are beyond help. The best you can do is to avoid becoming or creating one yourself.

Some Theme Suggestions:

- The Foul Stench of Failure
- Diseased Grasp
- Too Wretched to Feel Shame



JAWS OF SIPAKTLI

Long ago, the gods killed the great sea monster Sipaktli and used her body to create the world, but Sipaktli's body was deadly even in death. Every inch of it was covered in teeth and jaws, and anyone who set on that world would surely be torn to pieces. So Elopatiliztli the rain goddess swept across the lands, trimmed off all of these jaws to make the land safe, and tossed them into the Underworld where she thought they would never trouble the world again. Nakoyomiketl the god of the dead saw these jaws floating down into his world, and in his boredom he decided to turn them into something amusing for himself.

It seems Nakoyomiketl has a rather rough sense of humor.

The Jaws of Sipaktli are an impossibly numerous swarm of disembodied, limbless mouths that roam around the Underworld and occasionally find their way to surface through caves, fissures, or other cracks in the surface. Every kind of mouth exists among the jaws--caiman mouths, jaguar mouths, eagle mouths, shark mouths, and even hideous human mouths--and they appear in all shapes and sizes. Some are as small as a person's foot, while others are as large as a house (or larger). They hop along clumsily, snapping and heaving themselves enthusiastically towards anything even remotely edible. Their movements are almost comical at a distance, but they are capable of hurling themselves over immense distances. If they are within arrow range of you, then you are probably well within their jumping range. Nobody knows how they manage to see without any eyes, but they appear to have no problem sensing food in the surrounding area, even through walls or other barriers.

The sole purpose of the Jaws is to consume. They are extremely violent and savagely rip apart anything they catch. They seem to prefer living creatures, but they will gleefully throw themselves at anything--trees, crops, buildings, and more. They have no self-preservation instinct and no fear, and while they do seem to feel pain it only makes them more dangerous and frenzied. They will crash through obstacles to reach prey, tearing their flesh and breaking their teeth without flinching. They will not stop until they have been torn apart themselves. Anything they swallow goes down to the Underworld, where Na-

koyomiketl can add it to his immense trophy room.

They are hunger itself, set loose upon the world by a bored god looking for entertainment.

Some Theme Suggestions:

- Frenzied Hunger
- Pain Makes Me Stronger
- Clumsy Oaf

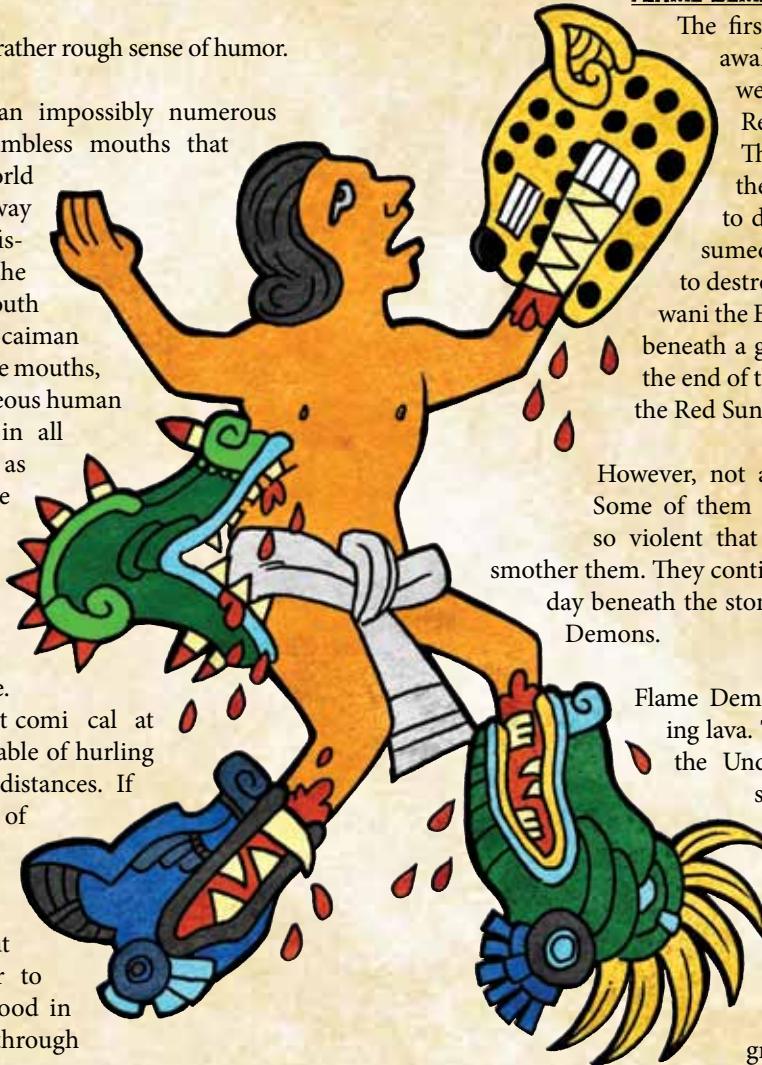
FLAME DEMONS

The first people to inhabit Seman-awak were the Fire People. They were created by Oleletl the Red Sun out of fire and ash. They were brave and strong but the only thing they knew how to do was fight. Their wars consumed the world and threatened to destroy everything until Itztechni-wani the Earth goddess buried them all beneath a great avalanche. This marked the end of the Fire People and the end of the Red Sun.

However, not all the Fire People died. Some of them were so powerful and so violent that the Earth could not smother them. They continue to burn on to this day beneath the stone. They are the Flame Demons.

Flame Demons are people made of living lava. They are raiding parties from the Underworld. They flow to the surface during volcanic eruptions to burn and pillage everything in their path and vent their unending need for warfare. They are extremely dangerous combatants and are more than a match for even the greatest Warriors. Their arrows are streams of liquid rock that are so hot they burn anything within 20 paces of where they land. Their clubs are solid columns of flame that sear flesh even if they miss. And their battlecries are like a blast furnace and can ignite entire units of soldiers before the battle has even begun.

Despite their lust for destruction, Flame Demons are not mindless brutes. They are cunning tacticians and strategists as well, and their units fight with a brutal discipline that human Warriors cannot help but admire. This has lead some humans to deliberately summon them in hopes of forging an alliance, and despite the recklessness involved with this it can actually



work quite well. At first, Flame Demons are happy to keep their word so long as the war continues. But inevitably the one who summoned them achieves his or her objectives or tires of the war and ends it, at which point the Flame Demons turn and begin slaughtering their old allies in an attempt to keep the war raging.

Flame Demons draw their nourishment from warfare. It is their food and water. So long as they fight, they burn forever. The only way to truly defeat them is to isolate them and deprive them of opponents to attack. Without an outside enemy, they will turn on each other until only one remains, at which point he will gradually starve and cool into cold stone.

Some Theme Suggestions:

- Flaming weapons
- Greatest Warriors Who Ever Lived
- Without Enemies, I Starve

LIVING GLYPHS

The Ancient Tonalteka left behind many ruins, many carvings, and many codices, and these great works contain countless secrets and treasures of knowledge. The people of today collect and study these relics in hopes of gaining a greater understanding of their origins and also their ultimate fate. But there are some secrets that resist such understanding and jealously guard the lore of the Ancient Tonalteka against the unwary and the unready. These are the Living Glyphs, writing that moves and changes over time.

Most of the time these Glyphs simply conceal ancient writings. They alter the images they inhabit and move the symbols around so that nobody can tell what the real picture is supposed to be. This almost never happens when somebody is looking, however--the Glyphs wait until nobody is around to make their changes. Other times they actively destroy writing, devouring it like a jaguar gorging itself on a kill and leaving the wall or codex completely blank.

But some Glyphs are more aggressive in their defense of the ancient secrets. They literally leap off the page or wall and attack any in the area. They possess all the power of whatever creature they depict--a jaguar glyph that comes to life can bite, slash, and kill as effectively as a real jaguar--and can return to the safety of the writing at will. Still other Glyphs actually pull the reader into the page, removing them from the mortal world and imprisoning them in the strange realm within the writing.

Nobody knows for sure what Living Glyphs are. Some suspect



that they are simply a magical effect placed by the Ancient Tonalteka on their important works. Others believe them to be creatures or spirits that were pulled into the world within codices and carvings and now live there permanently. Still others believe them to be the appendages of knowledge itself, an expression of a lore so complete that it has a mind of its own and can move and change itself the way a human can move his or her body. But until the Glyphs choose to reveal more, there is little one can do other than speculate.

Some Theme Suggestions:

- I Hold a Great Secret
- Claws to Spread Your Heart's Paint
- Follow Me Into Another World



PIZOTE

Pizote are clever, mischievous creatures who live all over Se-manawak. They resemble a cross between a lemur and a raccoon and travel about the world in small bands seeking trouble and excitement. Pizotes are quite intelligent, and though they rarely settle down long enough to build settlements or complex tools they are talented at creating traps and snares. Rather than using these to catch food, however, most Pizotes prefer to use them to set up elaborate tricks for unwary travelers.

Pizotes are motivated first and foremost by humor. They spend their lives seeking entertainment and fun, and everything they do is in pursuit of a good laugh. Unfortunately, humans are rarely “in on the joke,” and more commonly end up on the receiving end of Pizote mayhem. These furry pranksters almost never deliberately hurt people except in self-defense, but they don’t fully consider the consequences of their actions and often don’t care enough to undo any damage they cause afterwards. Most of the time, nobody gets permanently hurt. But there is a classic story tells of a gang of Pizote who dig a hole in a road and laugh heartily when a passing traveler falls in. They run up to the hole, tease the traveler as he picks himself up and curses at them and then wander off to find another joke while the poor human slowly starves to death in the hole.

Most villages view the local Pizotes with affectionate frustration, for the funny little creatures can be quite warm-hearted and entertaining, especially when their mischief befalls someone who deserves it. But they can also be rather mean and thoughtless, and in a world as unforgiving as Se-manawak, even a minor setback can spell disaster.

Some Theme Suggestions:

- I Always Have Another Trick!
- Anything for a Laugh!
- Small and Deft

KOATL

Koatl are the messengers and weapons of the gods. These impossibly majestic serpents are the literal rivers of divine power flowing into the world. They are the arrows the gods fire across the heavens. Just as there are countless different gods in Se-manawak, there are also countless different varieties of Koatl, each with its own personality and set of miraculous powers.

A Koatl’s appearance is a clue to its origin: some have glisten-

ing, mirror-like scales made from black obsidian, indicating they come from an Earth god. others have gorgeous, iridescent feathers in place of scales, suggesting that they come from the sky on behalf of some wind god. Still others are made of turquoise, which usually means they hail from the fiery lands and gods of the north. There are cloud Koatls, rainbow Koatls, flower Koatls, wooden Koatls, Koatls made of bone, Koatls covered in sharp quills, and even strange ones from the Southern Jungle with scales like the wings of a butterfly and bizarre, insect-like faces.

All Koatls have venom, but its exact properties depend on the nature of the Koatl. For some, it burns like a stream of lava. For others, it glimmers like a stream of mirrors. But venom is al-





ways the means through which Koatl's wield their powers--an obsidian Koatl might sink its fangs into the ground in order to unleash an earthquake, while a bone Koatl might summon fleshless with each acidic drop that falls from its fangs to the Earth.

Very few people ever see a Koatl in their lifetime, and those who do rarely live long after. The great serpents do not show themselves lightly and usually only arrive to kill an enemy or ease a hero into death. Stone Koatl's guard the staircases of many temple pyramids, and many believe, that when a person dies on the sacrifice stone, their last sight is Koatl's streaming

down from the sun above to carry them onward to their glorious reward. There are stories of people who have received gifts from Koatl's, stolen from them, or even defeated them. But nobody sees these as anything more than exciting fiction.

Some Theme Suggestions:

- Holy Venom
- Swim Through the Sky
- Voice of Heaven

SPIRITS

There is a vast array of spirits that inhabit Semanawak. Everything is animate, everything is alive, and everything possesses a consciousness and a will. Most of the time, however, these spirits have their attention focused elsewhere, the same way humans will fight an entire war on a piece of land and never even notice the vast colonies of ants living there. Such spirits are said to be "sleeping," not because they are inactive, but because their minds are elsewhere, just as a human's mind is elsewhere during sleep. Sleepers are not gone--they are merely somewhere else.

WAYOB-ANIMAL SPIRITS

Wayob are a category of spirits--specifically, animal spirits. Every animal, without exception, has a spirit, *is* a spirit. Watching their bodies is like watching a human who is asleep--you cannot appreciate their full complexity in that state. For the most part, this is perfectly fine. Humans hunt animals when they need to and animals react instinctively. Some escape, and some becoming food. To the Wayob, this is like dying in one's sleep.

But certain things can cause a Wayob to awaken--an imbalance in the environment, abuse by humans or other beings, certain spiritually significant times, and so on. Wayob rarely awaken for pleasant reasons however. They usually enter the world angry.

Awakened Wayob are every bit as intelligent and cunning as humans, but also possess the instincts and abilities of an animal. They can communicate, though unless they have spent a great deal of time around humans they won't know human languages very well. You may be able to speak to them with the aid of spiritual medicines. They typically view the world from a very different perspective than humans, however. This may offer unique insight into certain issues, but it can also make them difficult to deal with because their values are strange and they rarely care about the same things as a human. They often possess magical powers as well, usually exaggerations of the abilities they possess in their sleeping form.

ALUXOB-LAND SPIRITS

Aluxob are another large category of spirits--specifically, spirits of plants and the land itself. Rocks, trees, flowers, maize, rivers--all of these things have conscious spirits attached to them. Like Wayob, they spend most of their time asleep, living in another world or looking in another direction. Most humans assume that these things are stable and passive, and go about their day to day lives never realizing the deep consciousness that surrounds them. But every so often the land awakens and springs into action, and humans are left to acknowledge that nothing they know is static--it simply chooses not to move most of the time.





Name: _____
Kalpuli: _____
Status: _____
Profession: _____
House/Order: _____

TEYOLIA - PHYSICAL

Force OOOOO
Agility OOOOO
Endurance OOOOO

IHIYOTL - SOCIAL

Persuasion OOOOO
Deception OOOOO
Performance OOOOO

TONALLI - MENTAL/SPIRITUAL

Lore OOOOO
Divination OOOOO
Medicine OOOOO

OTHER

Craft/Trade OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

POWER THEMES

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

PATHS TO GLORY/GODS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

THEMES

- ☐ Red Sun
- ☐ Green Sun
- ☐ Blue Sun
- ☐ White Sun
- ☐ Gold Sun
- ☐ Birth
- ☐ Childhood
- ☐ School
- ☐ Day
- ☐ Night
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

DESTINIES

- _____
- _____
- _____

DAY ENERGY

Available:

Current:

FORTUNE POINTS



TEMIKAMATL

BOOK OF DREAMS



“You have arrived at your Home, People of Light! You shall live here at the Foundation of Heaven, the place where Sky meets Earth, where dreams awaken! As Heaven is full of wonder and beauty, so shall your home be full of flowers and feathers and all the colors that there are. As long as the Sun shines, your fame and glory will endure!”

Welcome to New Fire, a roleplaying and storytelling game set in the world of Semanawak, a fantasy world inspired by Precolumbian Mesoamerica and the great cultures that lived there--the Aztec-Mexica, the Maya, the Mixtecs, the Olmecs, and many others.

In New Fire players take on the roles of brave Warriors, devout Priests, and shapeshifting Nawal Sorcerers and, through a unique collaborative storytelling mechanic, create their own epic legends in this magical land.

This book, the Temikamatl, contains everything you need to get started playing New Fire:

- Detailed history of Semanawak and the cultures, gods, and spirits that inhabit it.
- Simple but powerful rules designed to pull together the best ideas of everyone who plays.
- Step by step character creation rules that will have you playing in no time.
- Gamemaster instructions for running New Fire.

The Sun that rises over Semanawak rises only through the struggle and sacrifice of heroes. If the people make offerings and nourish the world, the Sun will continue to rise each morning, and the story will continue. But without them--without You--there will be no Dawn, and the story will end forever!



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